

punk planet

notes from underground

ISSUE #59 JAN. AND FEB. 2004

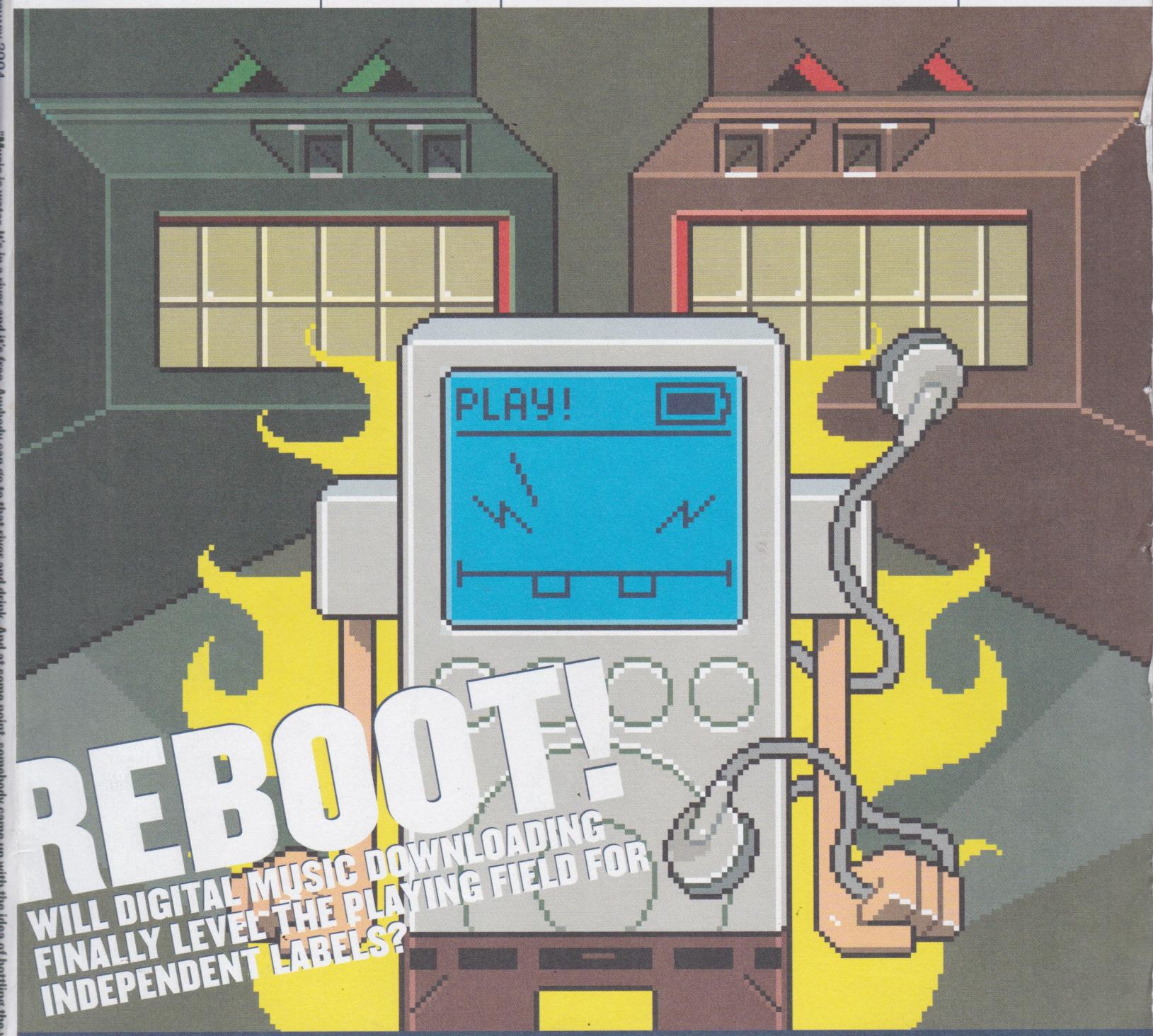
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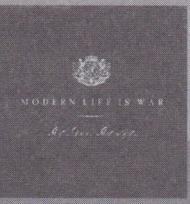




FORENSICS

FORENSICS-On A Bridge Atop The Heap of Friends Who Jumped -CDEP/7" on Magic Bullet Records

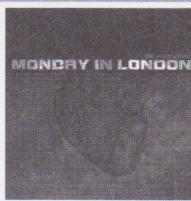
Former members of pg.99, Corn on Macabre, Burning Airlines, and more unleash 3 epic and devastating tracks of dynamic, heavy music that finally kills screamo dead, dead, dead. This marks a new beginning for the "Virginia" sound.



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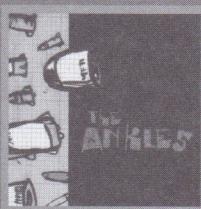
The Indianola Records debut from this genre smashing North Carolina rock and roll outfit. Beautifully sung and screamed lyrics, driving guitars, and super tight percussion. Expect a full dose of panty rock and guitar solos. For fans of Coheed and Cambria, Placebo, and the Juliana Theory.



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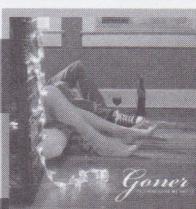
AJI is back! Featuring the original vocalist for Poison the Well and tracked at the infamous Studio 13(Poison the Well, Until the End). Expect a full dose of melodic hardcore with gut wrenching breakdowns. Turn it up to murder!



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PF59

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A DIY utopia comes together in Brooklyn; reinventing the craft fair; Brujeria emerges from secrecy; Negativland takes on Clear Channel—and wins; 400 Blows; Michelle Tea; Neptune; Get Your War On.

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I get really weirded out when I start to think about the responsibility, because I start to ask myself, "Am I really privileged enough to think that I can say something that these kids will fuckin' listen to? Who do I think I am?"

—Atmosphere

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reviews

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cover illustration

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call for pricing/availability on inside front & back covers.

Ads are due February 2 for PP61—our 10 year anniversary issue.

Ads not reserved will get in, but you have no say as to what issue. Any ads received after deadline may run in the following issue. Those are the risks ... Are you the gambling type? the risks

intro59

My how time flies. It doesn't seem like that long ago when I engaged in heated debates about vinyl being the only *true* punk rock medium; now virtually my entire music collection is digitized into the very computer I'm typing on right now. It's been quite a decade, if you think about it. I remember friends starting record labels to put out their bands' music—all it took was a few hundred dollars and a tape mailed down to a cheapo record pressing plant. They'd get back this piss-yellow (and piss-poor) vinyl and it was amazing: they had instantly become a *real* label. But today, you don't even need that. You just need a place on the web to put up MP3s and the fans will come—or so the hype machine keeps telling us.

In the handful of years that have progressed since Napster stirred up so much trouble, the digital music "revolution" has gone through countless cycles of hype and hatred. With this summer's introduction of Apple Computer's iTunes Music Store, the hype was back in full effect. Finally someone had come up with a legal digital-music model that seemed to make sense—and the newspapers and magazines that tend to overblow this type of stuff ratcheted their hype machines up to deafening levels.

Despite the hype (and the fact that the service was, in fact, pretty good), there was a glaring omission from iTunes: the online store launched with nothing but titles from the catalogs of the "Big Five" major labels—there wasn't an independent voice to be found on the entire service. That oversight has slowly begun to be corrected, with a handful of truly independent labels filtering into the store over the last couple months.

Finally things were getting interesting.

Using this milestone as a launching block, our cover story "Talkin' 'Bout a [platform] Revolution" peers through the hype to talk about the *true* significance and ramifications of music entering the digital realm. As you would expect, the underground doesn't speak in one voice on the subject. Instead our intrepid reporter Jeff Guntzel tries to incorporate the many disparate sides to tell a larger tale. It's a tale, ultimately, about a medium growing up and a scene that's grown up enough to see both the good and the bad sides of it.

Come to think of it, there's a lot of growing up in this issue. From Bright Eyes' Conor Oberst newfound perspective after a summer in the spotlight; Midwest indie hip-hop icon Slug from Atmosphere's struggle to cope with the emotional aftermath of a fan's death; to love-to-hate-him author

Neal Pollack's softer side showing through following the birth of his son; there's growth happening on almost every page.

It's happening behind-the-scenes as well. We've added another new recruit to our ranks to help with the workload of putting out two magazines (and books too—more on that later this year): Anne Elizabeth Moore. Taking on the title of "associate publisher" (we're not sure what it means either), Anne brings her background as editor of the *Comics Journal* and co-founder of the short-lived but amazing art zine *Matte* to the table. I for one couldn't possibly be more excited to have her help.

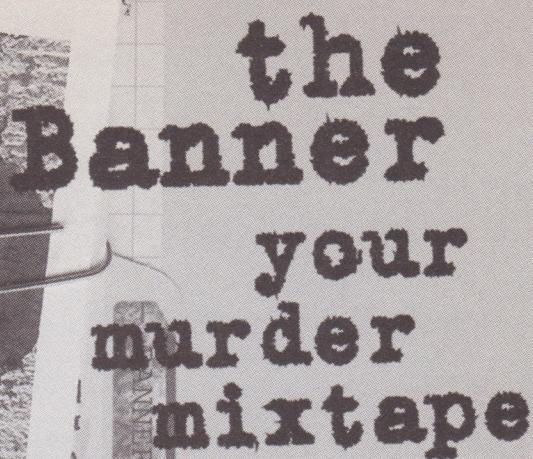
In addition to Anne's appearance in the magazine (she's also helming our brand-new independent comics review section), we have another new face: columnist Joe Meno. Joe's a phenom of a writer and a great addition to the columns. You'll be hearing a lot from Joe over the next year, I promise you.

Anyway, it's a new year, there's snow on the ground, and it's cold outside. Why not curl up in front of the heater and give this magazine a read?

Thanks,

DAN





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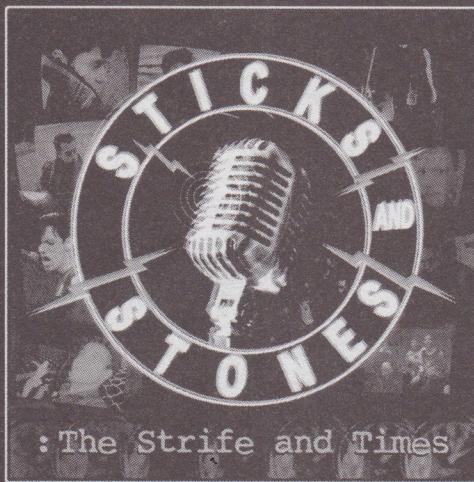
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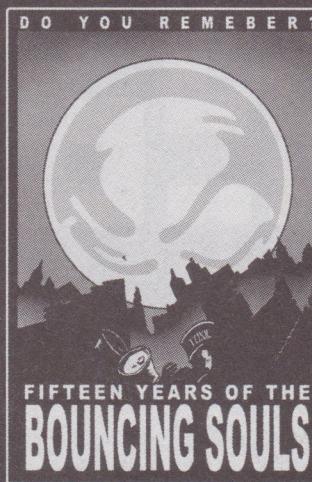
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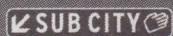
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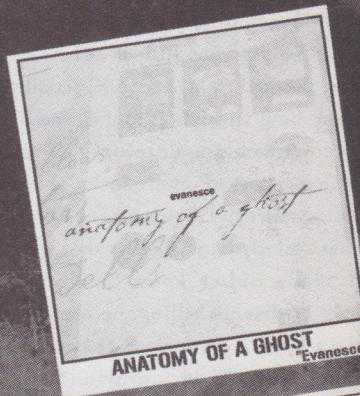


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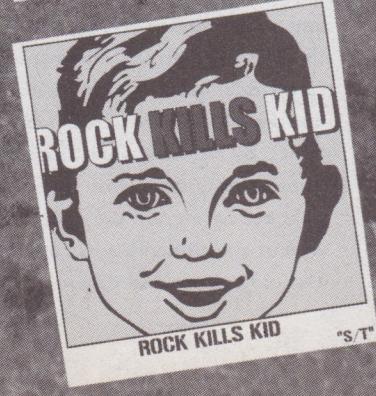
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mail59

Emo, Hopper, and Sexism

Editor's note: All these letters concern Jessica Hopper's column "Emo: Where the Girls Aren't" which was published in Punk Planet #56

► Hi Jessica-

My name is Kelli and I'm in a band from Detroit called The Trembling. My bandmates and I have been reading your column in *Punk Planet* for years and without fail it always becomes the topic of an in-depth discussion and analysis of music, gender, politics etc. at practice or in the minivan as we make our way to some show or another. After reading your testimonial about being a woman playing music in the current issue I literally set the magazine down and said out loud to myself, "That's it, I am e-mailing her."

The article brought back so many repressed memories for me and my youthful days as an aspiring Juliana Hatfield: Boys being shocked that I could actually play chords; boys in high school Stone Temple Pilot cover bands never inviting me to "jam" with them; boys who were jocks "shredding" the latest Alice in Chains hit as I stood in the corner secretly knowing that they were lame and really didn't know anything about music; boyfriends telling me I would never be in a band and mocking the absurdity of the idea; boys obviously pounding on my acoustic guitar after drinking all night. To say I can relate to your article is understatement. I definitely feel I lived it and it's so incredibly comforting and inspiring to see this commentary published. Luckily for me, my bandmates—both men—are two of the most encouraging and respectful people I know so those days are behind me.

With respect,
Kelli
Detroit

► Jessica—

I just wanted to write to express my enjoyment of your article in PP 56. I'm not usually a reader of *Punk Planet* because my musical tastes do not really mesh with those covered in *PP*, but every once and awhile I pick up a copy with an interesting cover and read it. I particularly enjoyed your recent column "Emo: Where the Girls Aren't." It struck me for some reason - perhaps it was the moment at which I read it, or perhaps it echoed similar thoughts I'd been having.

Just prior to reading it, I'd been sitting in class at grad school—what can I say I'm a privileged intellectual—where we had been discussing historiography, most specifically the work of Joan Wallach Scott. She discusses just the sorts of problems you address about music, but bearing on the study of history. Concealed somewhere in her academic jargon-speech is the problem of male mediation: Can women's voices ever be rescued when they are transmitted through men? And to what degree does talking about women shape both the options open to women, and our very ideas about what "women" are?

I can't claim to answer these questions but—to return to some semblance of a point—your essay actually allowed me to understand Scott better! It placed a similar issue in a different context and made it easier to navigate around. Your article showed that the way we talk about women, men, and inter-gender relations is important—that the mere presence of women in a narrative does not a feminist make, a point one would hope would be more self-evident. By looking into the discourse of women in emo, you demonstrate how what seems merely the individual expression of a wounded boy as gone on to create a whole culture and discourse of wounded

boys so that this picture of boy-as-victim and woman-as-heartbreaker not only becomes a common trope, but a sort of self-fulfilling prophecy.

Your portrayal of so much new emo music ("pop-punk with minor chords" is my preferred definition) as narcissistic and cuddly misogyny is spot on; though women may be portrayed in a "soft" light, they are nonetheless objectified. Women remain as objects and characters; they have no shadow or depth in these insipid songs. One wonders though if this is a function of emo as a genre, of its increasing commercialization (and thus incorporation into the capitalist-patriarchy), or more likely, as always, both.

Of course, I hope that you don't give up on emo altogether. I don't mean to wax music-nerdish, but when did emo become such a narrow term? What happened to the days when Fugazi, Cap'n Jazz, Moss Icon, Slint, Heroin and Mohinder could all be considered emo? There are so many great emo (or emoish) bands that express strong political and feminist messages, which stir the heart and the brain with depictions of *real* people and situations and the messy fuckups of real life rather than idealized romantic horseshit. I'm thinking of bands like Submission Hold, 1905, the Assistant, Harum Scarum, the Gossip, Circle Takes the Square, and many others.

I can't claim to be some perfect, feminist man—shit, the first thing *all* feminist men should realize is that they can't help but be sexist in a sexist and patriarchal society—but I just wanted to throw my few cents and thank you for writing an original, interesting, and - thank bakunin - thought-inspiring piece of music journalism.

In solidarity,
Andy

► Miz Hopper—

I just read your emo and sexism article and found myself nodding along and thanking the heavens that *someone* else out there is thinking along the same lines I do, and it's not just seen as me being "overanalytical". Having started out in "the scene" when I was 12 (I am now the ripe old age of 22), all I cared about was listening to Fugazi and the Misfits over and over. But I will always remember the first time seeing a girl up on stage and being like "Hey, I could be there too." you're totally dead-on when you say that while girls may be inspired by an all male band, it doesn't automatically mean that they are inspired to start their own band. Even when I did make the realization that I could be in a band, and sought out other female bands to listen to, it still took me until I was 19 to join one. Why? Because I was never really encouraged to pick up an instrument, not even by my older brother who has been in bands since he was 16. Also, quite frankly, I was scared to get up on a stage and play in front of the boys club of San Antonio.

Now that I'm in college, I'm surrounded by all these boys, most in bands, who have never even *considered* they could be sexist, or what sexism is. And if and when I bring it up (which I try to often), they either are quick to dismiss it or ask two questions and then say "pass me a beer." Hello frustration! And, since I'm Hispanic, I also bring up race in the scene as well, since all the kids that I hang out with are white. True to form, most of them had never thought about it much either, and this saddens me. The only good part about the discussions I've started about sexism and race in the scene is that long after said discussion, one or two

of them will actually say to me that it made them think and gave them a bit of new perspective, to which I answer "okay, so what are you going to do about it?" Insert blank stares here.

Thank you for getting your voice out there for all us gals that wanna be in the band—not date the band—and wanna see change of the guard now.

Cheers,
Nicki
San Antonio, TX

► Dear Punk Planet

At the behest of my wife, I read Jessica Hopper's column about girls in emo with great interest. As a man who genuinely likes women and has a wife who is a punk from way back, I'm glad to see this issue addressed. I can't tell you the problems that we have had over the years that stem, in some way, from this very issue.

If you think the emo scene is bad in this respect, try hardcore. More and more as we've grown older, my wife started going to fewer and fewer shows with me. My wife is my best friend (I know that's pretty fucking emo), and I want her to do things with me as much as possible, so the end result is that I go to fewer shows. I truly think a lot of why we've stopped going I to shows as much (aside from the fact that we live in Alabama) is that they make my wife uncomfortable. There are no women there, just little girls, which is OK, except that, as Jessica pointed out, they aren't getting what they need from a punk rock show. They don't even know what they are supposed to be getting from it. There's a lot of make up, a lot of belly shirts a lot of jewelry and trying to impress the boys—come to think of it, it's a lot like the food court at the shopping mall.

Here is my point: I think in Jessica's column she underplays the importance of the insurgence of rock music ideals into punk rock. Emo has been the catalyst for the mainstreaming of punk and it has allowed more of the rock mentality to seep into the punk scene. It used to be that people came into punk and got changed in ways they never imagined, like little fish learning to breathe when the water dries up. Today that ecosystem is flooded with non-native species that have diluted the supply of pure punk inhabitants. Punk is supposed to be inclusive. But nothing should ever be so inclusive that it simply ceases to be. It all boils down to rock ideals replacing punk ideals because those are the cool ideals to have right now.

I don't blame women for jumping ship. What is there in punk for them—or even for men—when there so much of the same shit you find on MTV floating around? Maybe the women are just too smart for all this nonsense. My wife put it best, I think, when she said we men and women have lost our angst and now all we have left is our broken hearts. That's pathetic. It's not punk rock anymore, just boring old rock.

I don't mean to downplay Jessica's feelings, or the feelings of women in general. I'm just saying what she is feeling as a woman is indicative of a greater ill in punk music. We are all feeling a little detached from it there days and it's not all because we are getting old or have specific genitalia. We've allowed the mudbloods to poison our cool little thing. I think, for the most part, men are just too macho to admit this upsets them. How emo is that?

Oakland L. Childers

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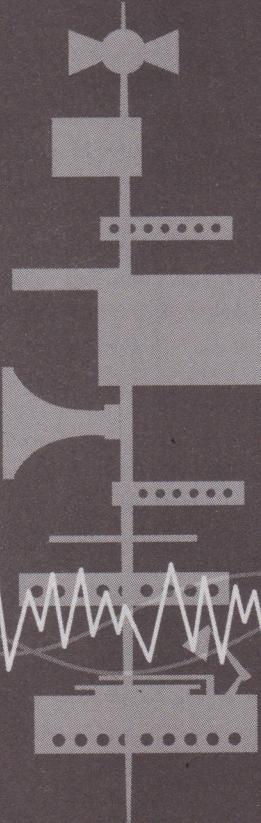
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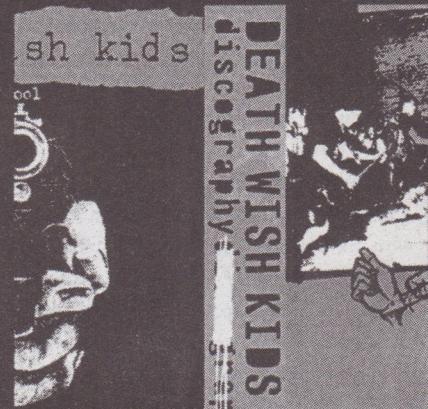
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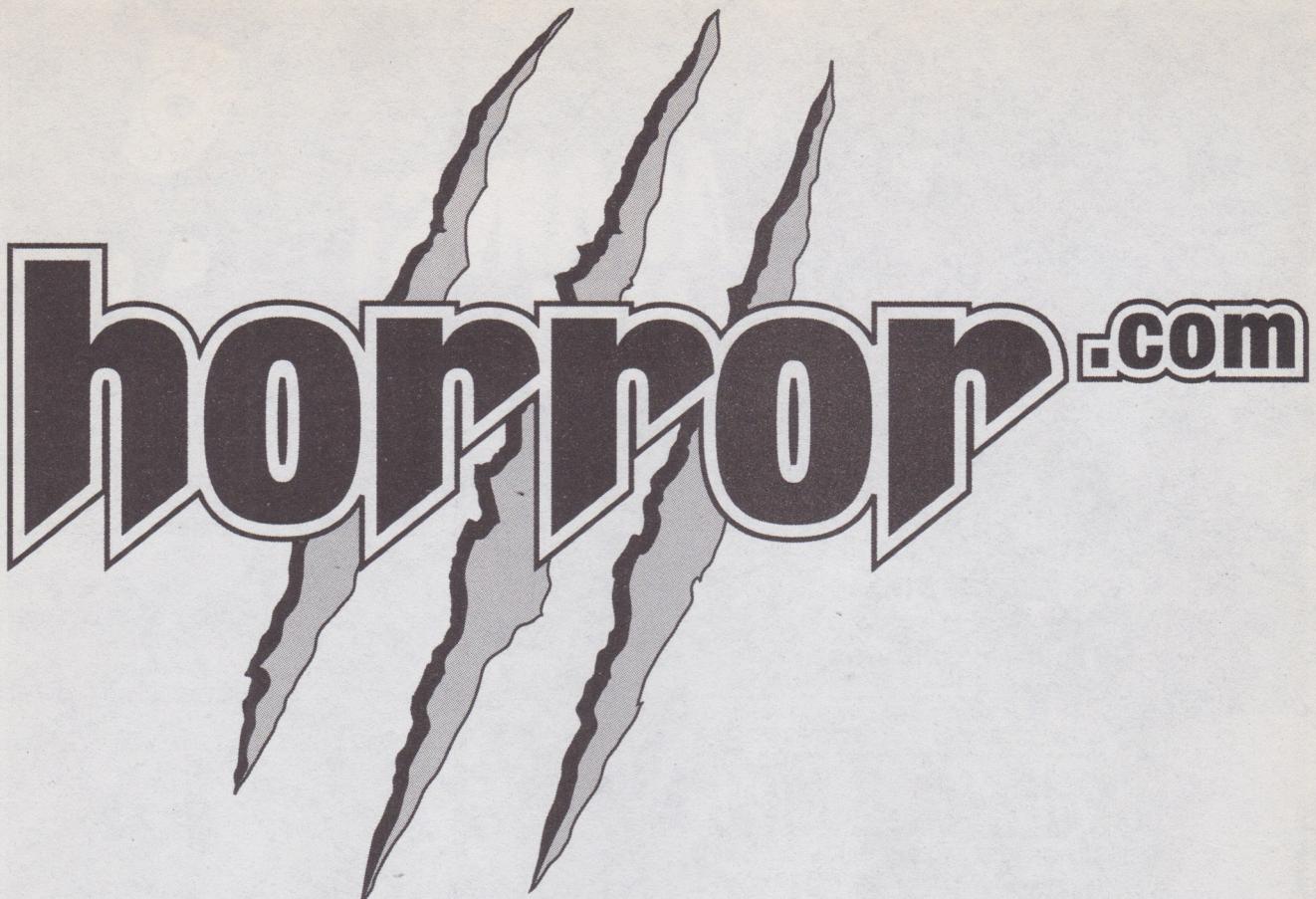


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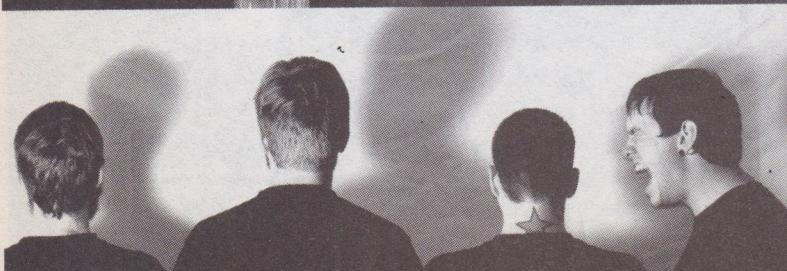
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"He brought us a bottle of whiskey and some blueprints and said, 'Let's get this going.'"

IN AN INDUSTRIAL POCKET OF BROOKLYN, A BAND OF PIONEERING UPSTARTS ARE BUILDING A DIY UTOPIA.

Deep in Brooklyn, between cement factories and meat distributors, Kevin Lindamood is launching a creative revolution. Behind a rusty, unmarked door sits Lindamood's OfficeOps, a community art center, office, and cultural center that provides artists and non-profits with inexpensive space and services. In a city where space and support are finite, OfficeOps is a savior for dancers, publishers, photographers and the like, who are short on money but long on ideas.

The mission is simple, yet revolutionary: "We want to bring a group of people together who can produce work without signing over intellectual property rights," says Lindamood, one of OfficeOps'

five principal partners. With content production—be it a magazine, play or song—intellectual property rights are the real value. They are rights typically relinquished when working within the confines of larger forms of content creation—a major record label or book publisher, perhaps. OfficeOps emphasizes creativity over cash flow. Here, ideas are currency. And they offer countless means to cash in.

The 15,000-square-foot former factory possesses a full DIY arsenal. OfficeOps—complete with 11-foot ceilings, refurbished floors and old-school pinball machines—features darkrooms, kitchens, studios, conference rooms, a radio transmitter, a functioning post office, and even a

3,000-square-foot floor where bands rock and skating parties roll. An adjacent floor offers DSL-equipped offices and studios renting at less than \$2 a square foot (a steal, considering New York City office space can run anywhere from \$10 to \$50 a square foot). So far, a theater company, a Japanese production firm, a yoga teacher, a capoeira instructor, and even a rooftop film festival have committed to the East Williamsburg facility.

OfficeOps is "a magnet school for content producers," Lindamood says. It's a dream that started four years ago when Lindamood and his soon-to-be associates—then just roommates—lived in a factory-to-loft conversion. They spent their time salvaging junk around the city, when on one of their salvaging operations they met Samuel Friedman, factory owner and Hassidic Jew who saw potential in this band of scavengers. Friedman who had recently lost some lofts

because of code violations, had a plan he had been cooking up for quite some time

"He brought us a bottle of whiskey and some blueprints and said, 'Let's get this going,'" Lindamood remembers. He showed them one of the buildings he had bought but never converted, and with that, OfficeOps was born.

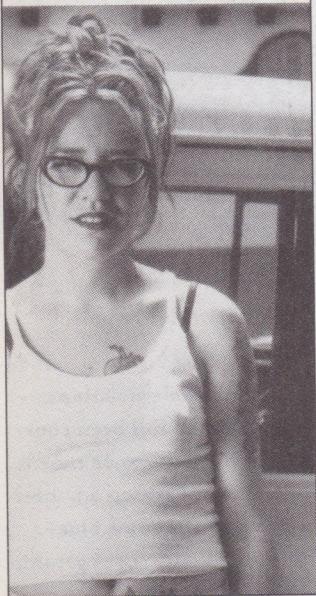
Over the course of four years, OfficeOps brought in 30, 24-foot trucks filled with recovered scrap (including lockers from Tyco, roller skates from Texas, and numerous cigarette vending machines) and cobbled together the resource center. They put in all the energy they could muster; and after hours of back-wrenching labor, hundreds of broken finger nails, and splinters on top of splinters OfficeOps is now open for business.

"Everyone that works here has leveraged themselves emotionally and financially much further than anyone should have," Lindamood says.

The potential of 15,000-square-foot space was too good

"For the past 10 years I've been writing my ass off."

TRUTH IS STRANGER THAN FICTION IN UNDERGROUND AUTHOR AND SPOKEN-WORD EVANGELIST MICHELLE TEA'S MEMOIRS.



Childhood is morbid." That's the kind of first sentence that makes you want to turn off your phone, stock up on necessities, and lock yourself into a book. Michelle Tea's memoir *The Chelsea Whistle* begins with young siblings playing dead until their mother intervenes and continues in that vein—funny, tragic, and true. Equally compelling are her coming-of-age works *The Passionate Mistakes and Intimate Corruption of One Girl In America*, *Valencia*, which won a Lambda award and was selected by the *Village Voice* as one of the top 25 books of 2000. Now that her notorious spoken-word road show Sister Spit is defunct, Tea curates a free spoken word series in San Francisco called 'Sorry You're Poor' and puts on monthly readings through the public library. Tea's writing exposes issues generally obscured by shame: class, queerness, sexuality, and abuse, but also contain all that is transcendent about literature, showing love, hope, and redemption in unexpected ways that blur the lines between real life and fiction.

Your books, while often billed as fiction for the most part weren't, were they?

Valencia won a fiction award, but don't tell them—I don't want them to take it away! They just assumed it was fiction, nominated it as fiction, and gave me an award, which was really rad. But I never *said* it was fiction, and the press hadn't said either way. To me it seemed really obvious that it wasn't fiction—the narrator's name is Michelle, she looks like me, she talks like me, she lives where I live. But then for the *Chelsea Whistle* they actually stamped "a memoir" on the cover. And again, that was just my press's decision, and I'm sure it's all about marketing. But I don't care whether they get pushed as fiction or nonfiction. For the past 10

to pass up. An art studio and offices were built first, followed by an event space and darkroom. And a radio station. And kitchen. Layer after layer was added until, like a papier-mâche community center, the facility was complete.

The tenants, not surprisingly, are pleased with the results.

For Rooftop Films, a film festival that premieres short flicks—where else—on rooftops, OfficeOps was an ideal fit. The non-profit needed a legitimate rooftop venue (that was copasetic with both landlord and firemen) with a large indoor space for rain dates, along with affordable office space.

"I know of no other space with that combination in New

York City—or elsewhere, for that matter," says Joshua Breitbart, Rooftop Films' co-director. The space is both "it's affordable and flexible, and it will disappear if we don't use it."

Moreover, OfficeOps is "great for DIY people," says Beth Duchardt, a member of the Compound Eye Theater artists' association. Compound Eye, which specializes in "high-enthusiasm and low-budget theater and art," staged a festival of sleep and dreams at OfficeOps. "The experience was outstanding" Duchardt says, because "if you don't have a lot of money, they'll work with you."

In fact they may even work with you if you don't have any money at all.

Take yoga teacher Delyn

Hall, for example. OfficeOps wanted to offer community yoga classes. Hall secured the job and, to keep costs low, OfficeOps provided studio space for free. This allowed her to charge just two dollars per class, thus opening yoga to a steady class of 10 students who may not have had access otherwise.

"Their willingness to support this endeavor is unparalleled," Hall says. A huge dance studio is prime . . . there's a lot of goodwill involved in this."

The OfficeOps mission is to "have a relationship with other people based upon a creative repertoire," explains Lindamood. This belief is reflected in the background of those involved. Lindamood

and the six principal partners—Jennifer Grogan, Dylan Taylor, Todd Grogan, Michael French, Michael Radosta, Eamonn Farrell—have backgrounds ranging from photo to video to forestry to disaster relief. They have lent their diverse talents—and surplus space—to a number of collaborations. From stop-the-war sign-making workshops to philosophical open forums to political art shows, OfficeOperers infuse their expertise into every program and idea.

Still, for all the goodwill and creativity, the center still operates at less than full capacity. Perhaps the "build-it and if they come, great" philosophy—as Lindamood puts it—is partly to blame. OfficeOps has never adver-

years I've been writing my *ass* off, and the three books came out of that. So everything is kind of cleared out. I feel like I'm going to have to start again from scratch. ¶ I have a new book that I'm working on too. I've only written three chapters, and I'm envisioning it being three sections dealing with addiction, alcoholism, and being poor; feeling like you have limited options and the coping mechanisms you find to deal with that. Or *not* deal with it. And I think it will have to be about what happened in San Francisco with the whole dot-com thing, trying to move away from that, and move away from yourself.

The city changed a lot.

It was a real drag. But I feel like I really came of age here in San Francisco; I felt like I'd found this *paradise*. So it was deeper than 'there are all these crappy changes happening in the neighborhood'—I had put all my stock in San Francisco and now it was crumbling. It's intense when you feel like there's no place else for you to be. I don't want to jinx the book by talking about it too much—it's still in the baby stages, so it could end up taking any form. I think I'm going to fictionalize it a lot. I know there are people who don't want to be in my stories, but if they were in my life for a chunk of time and had an intense impact, they're going to end up in there. So I want to change it, fictionalize it enough so that I can use aspects of reality that *feel* important, and that I'm motivated to talk about, and then mess it up so that these people

end up being different people in the story. That will be a good challenge for me, too. Because I'm always just writing about people exactly as I remember them. It will be good for me as a writer to push my imagination more.

It seems like there's a lot of pressure on books classified as nonfiction or memoir—I guess by the publishers—to give the reader direction, to assure them that what they're reading is *real* . . .

. . . or that it's *safely* fiction, and they can relax knowing these people never existed. I don't understand why it needs to be like that. I had a conversation with Ariel Gore, from *Hip Mama*, and she was telling me that in Japan, there's a whole genre of writing called the "I Novel" that's just a first person narrative—maybe the writing is true, maybe it's not, but no one trips on it.

But here, if it's fiction, people assume it's autobiographical, and if it's supposed to be factual then they're skeptical that it's secretly fictionalized.

There's a *lot* of skepticism. People approach memoir with a little more hostility than they approach fiction—it's really weird. If something is billed as fiction and then it's known that the author drew from their life experiences, I feel like it's seen as this admirable, more triumphant thing. But if someone is straight up saying "this is a memoir, this is real," people are weird about it. —Katie Richstaeter

Tea's latest book is published by Seal Press www.sealpress.com.

tised, preferring to build infrastructure rather than customer base. So, the business depends on a little word-of-mouth—and a lot of faith.

"We're not trying to convince people to come out here," Lindamood says.

"People come on the strength of the value. Because everything came out of the trash, we can give people 10 times the value for a 10th of the cost."

And that value continues to increase. OfficeOps is bustling forward with new ideas. Time-share offices and studio space are underway. Plans are being made for computer labs and student centers. There is even talk of constructing dormitories for a work-exchange hostel. For example, a photographer

could bunk in the hostel for several weeks, working concession at an event or repairing a rusty hinge. In exchange, he'd receive free lodgings, Internet, and darkroom access.

These are grand plans, yet Lindamood and OfficeOps remain grounded. Though the project grows and mutates, all expectations have been exceeded.

"We surpassed our goal a while ago," he says. "Right now we're just tangled up in the momentum. [If it fails] the worst case scenario is that we come out of this with a lot of great working relationships with people we respect and who respect us." —Joshua M Bernstein

For more information on OfficeOps, go to www.officeops.org.

"There may be people out there that wish this band dead."

THE NOTORIOUS METAL BAND BRUJERIA EMERGES FROM UNDER THEIR VEIL OF SECRECY TO PLAY A RARE SHOW.

For the past 12 years, headbangers who are in the know have traded gossip, bootlegs, secrets, CDs, and dubious "facts" about a Mexican metal outfit known as Brujeria.

The name Brujeria usually leads to the following conversations:

"Oh, yeah man! I heard those dudes were these drug smugglers from Mexico who, like, fund the Zapatistas."

"Yeah man, no shit, I heard they sacrifice American

tourists to appease their voodoo gods and shit!"

Or:

"No, way man. My cousin's buddies' nephew said that's all bullshit. It's a bunch of dudes from like Napalm Death and Fear Factory who get together and record on the weekend and shit."

"Yeah, yeah, my sister's ex-boyfriend engineered their last album. Yeah, he asked me to go with and all but I had, um, uh, err, a doctor's appointment or something."

GALLERY: Face Off

ARTWORK BY MARCO CIBOLA



"I have an appreciation for objects and people who have a quiet demeanor," says Canadian artist Marco Cibola. "I admire their subtle details; they tell the underlying story that I am interested in." Cibola's work is online at www.workbymarco.com.

The rumors are understandable when you consider the band's mysterious underpinnings. The band is comprised of anywhere from six to 12 members at any given time, all of whom refuse the many requests for interviews and insist on using aliases and concealing their faces with bandanas, ski masks, and baseball caps when being photographed.

And yet, somehow their mystery has not been much of an obstacle. The band has released five full lengths, including the recently released *Mexecutioner* greatest hits compilation on Roadrunner, and four EPs of extremely brutal grindcore metal, all of which is growled out in Spanish.

But after years of limiting their live appearances to sporadic "guest spots" on

other people's shows, they've decided to start playing live. And this fact has a lot of people in positions of power scared shitless.

After trying, unsuccessfully, to book a number of shows in California—foiled because of the threats of violence that follow the band—the group's current base of operations, the band finally landed their first official live gig on October 2, 2003, at the Aragon Ballroom in Chicago, Illinois.

A few days before the show, vocalist Juan Brujo and El Niño, the band's in-house artist and back-up singer, broke from their media silence to explain the reasons for the intense opposition the band has faced in booking their tour.

"Brujeria has earned its

name and people fear it," El Niño says. "I remember a guest appearance we made where the venue shut us down after the second song! The crowd got too violent. I saw a guy crazy enough to wear sandals, and he got his big toe split open really bad. There was blood all over the floor!"

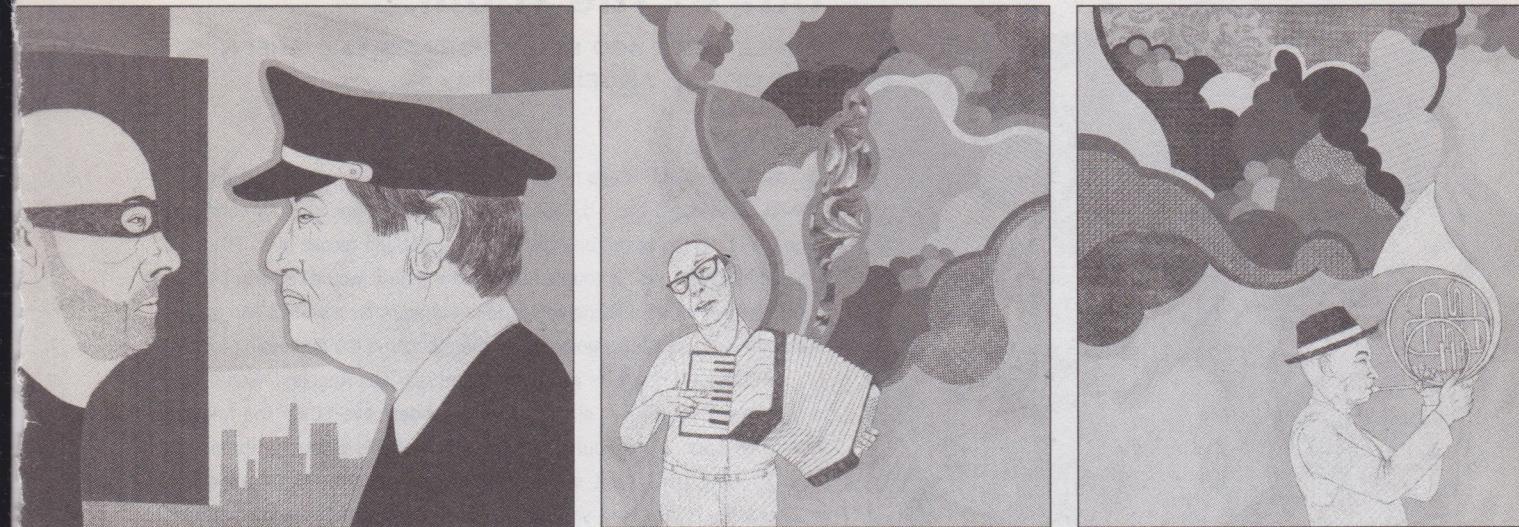
Back in August, the band began to promote a scheduled September 27 gig at the Allen Theater in South Gate, California. It looked like the band was going to actually pull it off, but after a few weeks of intense harassment by the local police department and members of the Catholic Church, the gig was canceled.

"[The local church group] said they would picket the gig and prevent *grenudos* from getting in," explains Juan Brujo. "They use this

for abortion clinics too. I guess we're the 'in' thing for them now. The Chief of Police of South Gate went to the venue with a few of his crew saying, 'If that show goes down, we'll get down old-school pig style and shut the venue down for good!' That one worked, gig cancelled."

Whatever juju these guys are using obviously works. They got the Chicago gig via contacts they'd made with a local Chicago promoter for the Aztlanfest tour. The band wisely limited the promotion of the gig to a few flyers and some spots on Spanish radio and TV.

The Aragon's security was tight, but the predominantly Mexican-American audience was fairly orderly—at least by metal show standards. No limbs were lost and no drunk motherfuckers staggered



around looking for a fight. It was just 300 or so long-hairs, mohawked punks, and goths slamming it up and having a good time.

Nothing that took place really validated the concerns of Brujeria's detractors, which leads one to believe that their real fear may lie in the band's message of Mexican pride, as evidenced by the crowds' intensely rowdy reaction to brown-pride anthems like "Hechando Chingasos" and "Matando Gueros."

Whatever the reason, Brujeria isn't being deterred as they continue with plans for more live shows. According to Juan Brujo, "Nothing is official, but we are planning shows in Monterrey, Mexico, one in McAllen Texas, and one in Ventura, California."

An album of brand new

material is not too far away, either, says Brujo. "We've used the same \$20 an hour studio since the first day.

Most of our stuff is written at the recording studio—nothing's done before we get there! That's always the fun way to do it!"

But even as the band's notoriety increases, their notorious veil of secrecy continues.

"There may be people out there that wish this band dead—you know, the DEA and other such three letter organizations," El Niño's thinly-veiled reference to the INS. "They would like to find out who the band really is, but, of course, you know that will never happen. Brujeria will always keep hidden."

Hidden, yes, but definitely not silent. —Ari M. Joffe

Go undercover at: www.brujeria.com

"When I think craft fair, I think duck art."

FOUR CHICAGO WOMEN KNOCK THE "CRAFT FAIR" CONCEPT ON ITS ASS.

The one good thing that comes out of these brutal Chicago winters is the uncanny ability of all Chicagoans to truly appreciate a perfect warm fall day. September 20th, 2003 was no exception. As the sun moved effortlessly through the cloudless sky, it shared its light with a colorful buffet of journals, sweets, jewelry, clothes, scarves, pet sweaters, bags, and posters set out as if they were wildflowers. The first annual Renegade Craft Fair was open for business.

For the last several years new arts and craft fairs have been popping up all over the city. However, despite the

growing popularity of these craft fairs, they often lack variety. No matter which fair you go to, you only come across a certain set of vendors. This year the Renegade Craft Fair organizers Susanna Blatt, Kathleen Habbley, and Christina Brazinski decided they would break that monotony and reach out to a new generation of crafty folk.

"We're crafty and we were planning on joining other fairs to sell our stuff, but the application process seemed a little too high-maintenance and stuffy, they were focused on 'fine-art'" Blatt says.

She also felt the hefty ven-



"You either have to listen, or you have to get out of the room."

THREE PIECE 400 BLOWS GRINDS THE SHEEN OFF OF LOS ANGELES.

Los Angeles and I have never gotten along. When I was my early 20s, I'd drive down the I-5, sleep on my sister's floor in Hollywood and stumble up to the stores on Melrose to dig through record bins. The vinyl was generally at least a couple bucks more than it would've been back in the Bay Area, and the scene was a bit of a drag. After a while I had to take some time off from L.A.; going down there became too depressing for me.

400 Blows stand as a symbol of the *real* Los Angeles. "Something a little more soulful,"—singer Skot Alexander says—than the fakery I happened upon in my youth. Christian Wabschall's guitar is missing the high E string because it seemed unnecessary for the band's cyclical, mathematically precise—yet huge—riffing. Drummer Ferdinand "Ferdie" Cudia pounds a kit with no toms, and Skot's voice is itself pared down to an animalistic wail that locks onto your ears with no intention of letting go. Everything is stripped down to the bare essentials, then stripped down again, grinding the face off the glamorous façade of LA.

dor fees of traditional craft fairs were financially prohibitive, considering the low prices she and her friends put on the items they make. And, let's face it: Blatt, who makes jewelry using guitar picks, and Habberly, who makes book covers and wallets out of antique fabric don't fit into the aesthetic that the existing craft fairs want their vendors to sell. So they decided to start something new.

In recent years magazines like *ReadyMade* and websites such as GetCrafty.com and Digs.com have drawn in-the-know readers by offering easy-to-follow advice on DIY projects. These sites delineate a wide variety of useful endeavors including how to re-wire a lamp, how to make throw pillows out of old sweaters, and

how to improve your credit rating. GetCrafty.com readers can buy items that they see on the site, and find links to a variety of other craft oriented sites that lead to even more sites that offer more ideas, resources and unique items for purchase. Exploring these networks led Blatt and company to the idea for the Renegade Craft Fair,

"We knew that the DIY craft movement was getting a lot of momentum for a lot of reasons," Blatt says. "It's definitely an artistic outlet and form of self-expression for the artist. It also provides an alternative to mass-produced goods and cookie-cutter consumerism that people are tired of. It gives the buyer a chance to get some things that are totally unique. We thought

a fair would be a great way to tap into the movement"

They placed ads in local papers, on websites, passed out flyers, and sent personal invitations "to other crafty people we knew." They set their booth fee at an affordable \$50, and after only three months, they had nearly 150 applicants for only 75 booths! They had obviously tapped into something big.

"Generally when I think 'craft fair,' I think of a different crowd, a much older, more serious crowd, who travel a lot so they can do this full-time," says Nick Butcher, a painter and silkscreen artist from Tennessee who had several prints on display at the fair. "But a lot of people here just seem to be making things

because they want to and if they make a little extra on the side, I think that's great.

Everyone seems to be having fun and enjoying the day."

When her new roommate asked Katie Young, who recently moved to Chicago from Atlanta, if she'd like to go a craft fair, she was skeptical. "I wasn't all that excited to come," she admits. "I was picturing a lot of lace and green paisley and statues of mallards—when I think craft fair, I think duck art."

Once she arrived, however, all her prejudices melted away.

"The thing that really struck me was how there were all these stands where people were selling the scarves and hats they had knitted, but then were also selling the banana

Songs like "The World's Largest Miniature," "The Ugly Are So Beautiful," and "The Shipwrecked Sailor," seem to speak of the alienation of living in Los Angeles, where everyone wants to be a superstar and so much emphasis is placed on the superficial. Do you see your music as a reaction against where you live?

Christian: That seems like your slant, dude. [laughs]

Skot: LA has a lot of qualities about it that one could hate, but at the same time it's kind of like a person—everybody knows people differently. LA has got a lot of qualities on the surface that you could really hate, but you've got to understand that whenever there's one thing, there's always the antithesis waiting in the wings. You have a lot of this plastic type of stuff, but you have a lot of that *everywhere*. On the other hand, you have a lot of people working in the underground trying to bring forth something a little more soulful. It makes it a beautiful place to live and a challenge at the same time, which is nice.

Christian: LA is definitely the land of extreme opposites. You have everything on this side and the other side. That's why it's fun to live there.

When you guys started the band, did you intend to not have a bass?

Skot: The bass player thing was never anything that was intentional. Before Christian was in the band, we actually had a girl bass player and she didn't get along with one of the band members at that time,

so she gave us an ultimatum: "Either he goes or I go." And we said, "Well, he's not giving us an ultimatum." So she left. Once we had Christian, all of the sudden we started writing songs without a bass and we were like, "Fuck, let's see what we can do with this." Most people don't seem to notice that it's missing. I like the idea, too, of working with very little; of getting the most out of one pedal. There's really not a lot of layering going on—it's all about the backbone.

Christian: Plus, it's only five strings—it's not even the whole guitar.

I was listening to your CD today, and my girlfriend couldn't take it. She said something like, "It's too intense; it's making me nervous." [laughs]

Skot: Is that a bad thing?

Well, that is the question: It seems to grate on the nerves—I mean that in a good way—and it makes itself impossible to be played as background music. Is that your desired reaction?

Skot: I can say that, first of all, one man's trash is another man's treasure. But, second of all, there's plenty of bands out there that are more or less background music. It's good that there are bands that are intense—that aren't intended for background music. You either have to listen, or you have to get out of the room. As far as rock'n'roll is concerned, that's the *essence*. —Duncan Scott Davidson

Hit it at www.400blows.net.

bread that their friend had baked or a CD of their friend's band," Young explains. "There seemed to be a lot of sharing and mixing going on, which made for a really wide variety of talent and media. It seemed like there's a real sense of community among people here."

Blatt, Habberley and Brazinski are already planning the next year's Renegade Craft Fair. After all, the women know a good thing when they see it.

"We don't really want to change it much," Blatt says. "We might make it a little bigger, and we definitely want to make it a two-day event, but other than that it looks like we have a really good thing, why mess with it?" —Cate Levinson

Stitch it up at www.renegadecraft.com

Teatro Trono

BOLIVIAN STREET THEATER ACTS OUT POLITICS, LOVE, AND FLEAS.

Choco-LATE! Choco-LATE!" barks 14-year-old Marcelo Bazan, as he, Mauricio Pereyra, Maya Cahua, and Shezenia Hannover work the crowd, hawking chocolate and other sundries. They're wearing black face paint and colorful patchwork pants.

A politician from the "ABC" party arrives on the scene and woos them with promises of shoes, cars and houses. They pledge to vote for him and pose for a confetti-strewn photo with the smiling politician. Then, when they ask for their shoes and cars he says, "After I'm elected" and takes off.

They all return to their respective hustles in the street. Until, suddenly the police seize Marcelo and beat him viciously. Suddenly they are united, marching together with fierce intensity. Their fists are raised, ready to throw stones.

This is a skit entitled "Vida de Perros" (*Life of Dogs*). It's a production of Teatro Trono, a children's theater group comprised of kids from the poor barrio, El Alto, in La Paz, Bolivia. Sociologist Ivan Nogales founded the group 14 years ago when he was working with a group of boys who were living in a detention

center there. They started out as street performers, and would often catch the attention of passersby with their elaborate, energetic, and poignant presentations. Now they have their own building in El Alto, and close to 100 youth are involved in the project. Some of them are homeless and nearly all of them come from poor indigenous families who live in the surrounding area.

Over the years they have received several international grants which, in addition to the groups fundraising efforts, has allowed the kids to publish a book and travel repeatedly to Europe and the US in order to perform their popular education-oriented street theater that depicts the realities of life in Bolivia and other develop-

"I've gotten a lot better at not cutting myself, but it's pretty much an inevitable part of playing in this band."

WITH THEIR HOME-MADE METAL INSTRUMENTS, NEPTUNE BUILDS A WHOLE NEW SOUND.



ing countries. Their plays cover a wide range of topics including love, politics, sexism, economics—even fleas.

"It's a way to express what you're feeling, a way to really say something about important issues," said Camino, who is of Aymara Indian and African heritage. He's been with the theater for four years.

They kids write many of their own skits as a group. They also "look for indigenous authors from all over the world," says Bazan, who has been with the theater since he was only seven years old. "We also try to bring attention to unknown writers. We look for pieces with messages: social, spiritual, about life."

He tells me about one of his favorite pieces. In this

piece, they address the problems that plague contemporary gender roles: "The play opens as Marta's husband [played by Pereyra] has to wake her up for work after she spent the night drinking with her friends. Then he has to endure her abuse as she begins to yell, commanding him to find her shoes, make her breakfast, quiet the baby. On the way to work Marta [played by Hannover] squeezes the ass of a man on the train, then at work she and her coworker talk about how men are inferior to them. Later on when Pereyra tells Hannover he's pregnant, she gets mad and storms out the door. He purposely jabs himself with a needle as he sews and laments, 'God, why was I born a man!' Finally Hannover

Neptune is one of those bands that you have to see to believe. They make their metal instruments from scratch and play with an energetic intensity that is *literally* dangerous. The first time I saw them play was in a radio station in Williamsburg. I was standing dangerously close to percussionist Dan Boucher—who was furiously banging away on an array of saw blades—paralyzed with fear as his elbow nearly slammed into my face more than once. But that didn't hinder his style. There was Jason Sanford shouting out the lyrics and attacking his guitar, Mark contorting around his bass, John Manson pounding on his drum kit with that scary fucking gas mask on his face. Dan's pants split halfway through the song—you didn't ask, but Dan goes commando.

What was the impetus to make your metal instruments?

I was taking sculpture classes and doing a lot of welding and I was also spending a lot of time playing guitar. One day I thought, "I wonder

stumbles home drunk, again and starts beating her husband. Then the alarm clock goes off and you realize it's all a dream; now it is Pereyra yelling at Hannover to find his shoes and silence the baby."

"There is a lot of machismo in Bolivia," 11 year old Hannover pipes in, "Men don't treat women right."

It was the way the kids confront real-life problems that first attracted Bazan to Teatro Trono. When he first saw them perform, "I was enchanted," he remembers. "Using theater you can meet lots of people and you can show anything you want, you can send an important message to people."

The group tries to educate the rest of the world about the way people live in

Bolivia. Pereyra says some foreigners think Bolivians are "savages who live in the jungle," and that the clownish patchwork pants the actors wear as costumes are their everyday street-clothes.

"I want to show people what life is really like in Bolivia," asserts Bazan, who has been to Europe six times and Chicago three times. "I think about my culture a lot when I travel. I begin to realize what makes my culture important and strong."

All the kids say they want to continue to act throughout their life, although they realize it is unlikely they will ever earn much money doing it. Hannover wants to get a scholarship to study medicine and become a doctor.

"There are many poor

if I could weld a guitar." It seemed like such an obvious idea that I figured I had to do it. Also I was hoping that by combining my interests it would help me to feel less scattered. The first guitar took a really long time to make and it was really rough and hard to play. Then a good friend of mine saw it and he said that it was really inspirational and it gave him some ideas for instruments that he could make. I thought that was about the best compliment I could ever hope to get and so I decided to keep making them.

Those instruments look kind of dangerous sometimes—especially Dan's saw blades drum hardware. Are there any injuries to speak of?

Mark: It seems to me that any injuries that have occurred since I've been in the band have either happened to Dan, or were inflicted on others by Dan. When I first started playing with Neptune I'd make attempts at some fancy-pants fast-sliding string frolic and almost rip my finger off on the empty spaces between the frets. I'd just wince in pain and hope the other guys wouldn't notice.

Jason: I was standing at the bottom of the stairs on New Year's Eve a couple of years ago when I heard Dan falling down the flight above me. We were loading out after the show and he was carrying a bunch of drum equipment. It was like a cartoon sound effect—it sounded like an entire drum kit being hurled down the stairs. A few seconds later Dan walked past me with his hand over one side of his face and blood streaming out from between his fingers.

people in Bolivia," she says. "There are three-year-old kids in the street with no food or clothes. There are many kids who live in the street but they have dreams; they want to be an actor or a doctor or they want to be president," she says. "People say to them that they aren't going to make it, so they don't ever get to try. It's true, we are in the streets just trying to survive, but even then we have dreams of big things for the future. We want *more!*"

Part of Nogales's aim in founding the group was to help educate people in the US, and around the world, about the effects of free trade policies and international intervention in Bolivia and the developing world.

"Recent uprisings in

Bolivia, Ecuador, Argentina, Venezuela," he says, "show we aren't content, we are tired of so many abuses. IMF-mandated programs and other international policies don't solve anything. Each time there is more poverty, more kids on the street, more malnutrition. The crisis is getting worse and worse. The world needs to see what's happening as a result of these policies."

He and Teatro Trono want to use their performances to send a message to the developing world:

"They are the echo of voices of the poor people," he says. "These voices need to be heard." —Kari Lydersen

For more information, contact *La Voz de Los de Abajo* at lavoz@rojo.net.

He was saying, "I'm OK, it was nothing, I'm OK."

Dan: I've gotten a lot better at not cutting myself, but it's pretty much an inevitable part of playing in this band. I have numerous permanent scars, and once I had to get my finger stitched shut. Also once I threw a drumstick that hit Jason's ear and made him bleed—that was cool.

My friend told me about some band called Tussle—he said they have metal instruments or something, too. Have you heard of these guys?

Mark: I haven't, but on tour we frequently bump into other people who play homemade instruments. By and large the people who encompass the instrument-building subculture are an odd bunch: a delicious blend of mad scientist, true believer and social outcast.

Jason: During WWII, they made stand up basses out of aluminum for use on naval vessels, so we're not the first to use metal instruments. ZZ Top had a couple of metal guitars they used in a video in the '80s; I'm not sure if they really worked, but I saw the instruments on display at the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame.

Dan: When we go on tour we always hear stories about people who make their own stuff. The only thing I've been successful at building is debt, so I commend anyone that can make playable instruments. It's no small task. —Jen Ambrose

Don't run with sharp objects to www.neptuneband.com

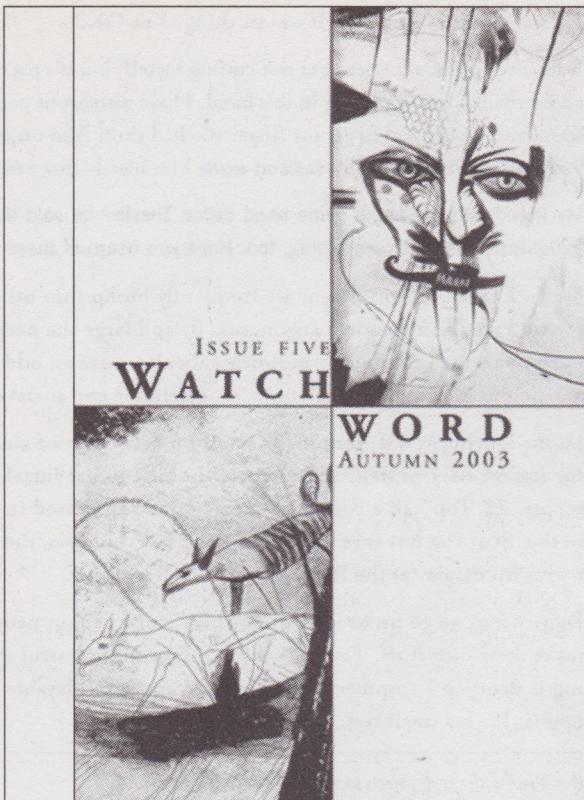
"Ever since I was a little boy, I always wanted to be on the radio entertaining people of all ages. What a fool I was!"

A JOKE GOES WRONG FOR A CLEAR CHANNEL AFFILIATE THANKS TO ART PRANKSTERS NEGATIVLAND

Seattleites, raised on KEXP, annoyed with the insufficient landscaping employed by Eddie Vedder's household and served beers by a member of the now-defunct Fastbacks, are said to be a tad picky about their music. But it took Bay Area art noise band Negativland, known for their sound collage and media pranks to right a long-standing wrong against this musically-minded city. OK, OK,

it's all a big joke, but it certainly wasn't funny to the Clear Channel affiliate forced to change its radio playlist a few weeks before this issue went to press after the Negativland prank was popularized on the Internet.

The joke started innocently enough a year and a half ago. The band was invited to contribute to "Reclaim The Media," an event sponsored by the Seattle Indy Media



"People should be encouraged to publish something in their life."

LIT ZINE WATCHWORD PRESS PUBLISHES FROM THE HEART.

There's this Prince song "Love or Money" that most independent presses could adopt as a theme song. For now, *Watchword Press* is no exception, but they're not letting their lack of funds stop them. Since 2000, the non-profit, all-volunteer publishers print and self-distribute a bi-annual literary magazine, organize community events, and eventually plan to publish books by emerging American and Eastern European writers. Fueled by a commitment to literary diversity, the three founding editors—Danielle Jatlow, Amanda Green, and Liz Lisle—produce and distribute challenging volumes of poetry, fiction, and, most recently, politics. I met up with publisher Danielle Jatlow to see how they do it.

How do your themes come together for each issue?

Publishing a literary magazine is interesting because you are taking so many different experiences and approaches, and trying to fit them in one book. You don't have to read it cover to cover, but there has to be some sort of cohesion. We don't put a theme out;

Center scheduled to coincide with the 2002 National Association of Broadcasters Convention. Negativland invented a non-existent shock-jock named DJ Diekobiscz (pronounced *diek-o-bitch*) and pirated the radio stations that surrounded Clear Channel affiliate KJR-FM, which claimed to play "The Greatest Hits of the '60s and '70s." In fact, the station played many songs from the 1980s—including "Kokomo," from 1988.

This seriously tacky revisionism was the basis of Negativland's argument against KJR-FM: false advertising. For evidence, they pointed to quintessential 1980s artists like Huey Lewis and the News, Air

Supply, Men at Work, and Cyndi Lauper—all in regular rotation on the station. From this, they mounted an attack on Clear Channel, based on the media magnate's clear contempt for its listeners and ability to spread bald-faced lies.

DJ Diekobiscz ranted and raved about this in a 24-minute tape loop that played frequently on several pirate stations throughout the 2002 NAB Convention/"Reclaim the Media" weekend.

Fortunately, Negativland was thorough in creating Diekobiscz, even forging a history for him that they listed on their website. "Ever since I was a little boy, I always wanted to be on the radio entertaining people of all ages,"

says the DJ in an essay subtitled "Hateful And Proud Of It!" on Negativland's website. "What a fool I was!"

The narrative of Diekobiscz-as-fucking-asshole grows, as his foray into the world of truth-telling, Rush-style, becomes his life's obsession. Diekobiscz quit his job, the story goes, while his wife, "having just undergone an emergency abdominal hysterectomy, succumbed to her disease Unable to support his two young children, Diekobiscz waived all parental rights and shipped his four-year-old son to New Zealand to be raised by a great aunt he'd never met, while putting his infant daughter up for adoption." Having abandoned his family, the fake radio per-

sonality (played by Seattleite Pat Cashman, formerly Bill Nye of *Bill Nye the Science Guy*)—again, all according Negativland's self-constructed narrative—is given a show on Seattle's KJR-FM, a Clear Channel affiliate.

Real KJR DJ Bob Case's schtick is nearly as abominable (perhaps moreso because it is real). Despite the station's stated dedication to the music of the '60s and '70s, Case initially snuck several '80s songs onto his playlist, claiming that the 1970s didn't end until well into the 1980s. Immediately following the initial 2002 NAB Convention, Case even doubled the number of '80s songs on his playlist, in apparent defiance of the

we put out an open call and anyone in the world can submit. There are three editors, and we have long—almost heated—editorial discussions about what to include. It's by collective decision, and the themes slowly sift to the top. *Watchword 5* was kind of a struggle, and maybe it was the political nature that made it that much more difficult. This was the first 'In Response' section and it was a harder, more complicated process.

I wanted to ask about that section—it gives writers the forum to react to unwelcome political developments. What prompted you to add it?

We typically publish poetry and short stories, and we always choose ones with different perspectives. A story about immigrant experiences, a story about an inner-city high school principal. But we wanted to be even more political, and give writers a chance to respond creatively to a section of the Patriot Act. We picked the section on libraries because we thought that was closest to a poet or writer's heart—who's reading what. When that privacy is taken away, that's a serious thing for a poet, a writer, and for the reader.

Your overall goal is to turn to book publishing, with an emphasis on Eastern European translation, right? How did you choose that?

Well, that's my family background, and also when you're an independent press, you have to look at what the other people are *not* doing. I started the press as a reaction against mainstream publish-

attention the matter had received. Negativland named Case the primary culprit in the debacle.

Case's insult to history ceased in the late summer of 2003, however, when the matter received national attention via Negativland's website. Approximately a year and a half after the original airing of the prank broadcast, visitors to the site were finally able to hear the tape loop and read Diekobiscz's history. As word of the prank began to spread across the Internet, it was obvious the gig was up for KJR-FM. As last year's joke began to snowball into the present, Clear Channel silently reformed the KJR-FM playlist following a recent wave of e-mails demanding an

end to Case's misstatements.

"The inspiration for the KJR prank was obviously quite silly, but we had

great fun attacking the right target for all the wrong reasons," says Negativland. "It was really appealing to us to

ers who don't put a lot of money into translations. They just aren't interested. If you look at it from the macro level, there won't be those classics anymore. I'm dumbfounded by how much the publishing industry has turned toward celebrity books.

Well, they know those will make money.

Which I understand—even publishing a literary magazine is very expensive. But publishing is an industry that's disseminating ideas to the public. There are some awesome presses in the Bay Area and all over the country—*independent* presses and magazines, organizations that are publishing really interesting work. The more the commercial publishing world maintains that market-driven mentality, and the more the conglomerates come in and buy up the independent houses, the more reaction there will be against it. This area has a supportive community—we scheme and talk about what else we can do.

Do you read everything you get?

Amanda Green reads every submission—*hundreds*. By the time we publish a story, we've all read it maybe 15 times; they're the pieces that continue to deliver meaning and keep our interest. I always think that people should be encouraged to publish something in their life, whether it's to their friends, or through a zine, whatever format you can. —*Katje Richstaater*

Read all about it at www.watchwordpress.org

use the idiot character of Jack Diekobiscz to go after these guys. And Jack 'won', much to our surprise."

—*Anne Elizabeth Moore*

The now-notorious Diekobiscz tapes are online at www.negativland.com

wide—as he was for the records that bore the Sound Virus logo. These days The Blood Brothers, Pretty Girls Make Graves, and Liars are bursting into the mainstream's consciousness with reckless punk abandon, and a new wave of Sound Virus bands including The Red Light Sting, The Cinema Eye, and Death From Above are not far behind. It seems the success has had a mellowing effect on Ott, who now just wants to focus on putting out quality records that will one day push out most of the dreck that plays on modern rock radio. Lofty goals aside, Ott has given rise to a veritable indie-empire, as his other passion, filmmaking, has become an essential element of the future of Sound Virus.

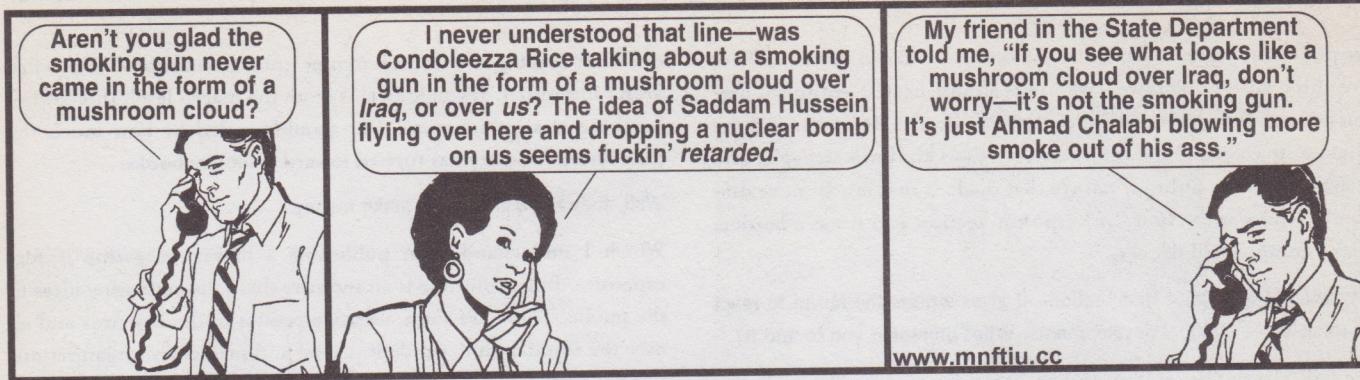
"I've never taken a dollar out of the label. I've never even bought a cup of coffee with it."

EVEN THOUGH THEY HELPED LAUNCH SOME OF TODAY'S BUZZIEST BANDS, SOUND VIRUS RECORDS STILL KEEPS IT REAL.

Mike Ott doesn't need to shit-talk anymore; the track record for his label, Sound Virus, does all the talking. It wasn't too

long ago that he was known just as much for his scandalous print ads—that lambasted many bands and labels nation-

Get Your War On BY DAVID REES



Before you did Sound Virus, you did Hopscotch records. How did that label turn into Sound Virus?

Hopscotch records started when I lived in San Diego with Aaron. We saw kids our age putting out records—we just wanted to try it. I got all this money from my dad for child support, and Aaron had money saved, so we started with the Death Wish Kids record and it just snowballed. That record did really well, and then we did a Submission Hold record and it took off. Aaron quit doing the label and I kept it going, but it was never truly my own thing so I quit Hopscotch and started something by myself. I think I started Sound Virus in 2000 and it's been doing better than I thought it would.

You never used to put out CDs . . .

I hate CDs. All my CDs are in a stack that my friends call the "slot pile". I just have no respect for them. But at the same time, I lose money putting out vinyl only. If I put out a CD, at least we can do awesome stuff with the packaging of the vinyl, or I can hire someone to do a cool design. The CD will make up for the cost of that. That's pretty much

the only reason I put them out. Also, I was putting out records for bands and putting all the work into it and getting bands popular and then some offshoot label would put out the CD and make a ton of money off something that I put all the work into. Not that it's all about making money, but I don't want someone else to make it if I'm doing all the work. I would rather make it so that I can put it back into Sound Virus and put out a new band. I don't really mind CDs now, because it evens out the cost of things.

Punk rock or not, running a label is a business. Where does the punk and the businessman converge?

There is a lot of work that you have to do. I think it has to do with each band, like whether they want to do a lot of promotion or not. If they do, I'll do it. If they don't, I'll just make sure the record is in stores. It goes by the release. But there's shit I hate doing. I hate writing one sheets. I can't write them. I feel like such a fucking wet-dick trying to tell someone "this band is going to be big, they're featuring members

of...blah, blah, blah". So a lot of the times I hire someone to write descriptions for me.

Speaking of networking, another interesting thing you add to the community is that you're into film. How does that add a flavor to what you do?

I'm trying to find a way to incorporate filmmaking and putting out records. Making videos is the obvious choice. I started Sound Virus when I got into filmmaking, so it's all tied in together. The logo is from an Alfred Hitchcock storyboard. Definitely a lot of the films I've made are sound-heavy, having bands recording songs for films I make. It's all intertwined.

You've talked about filmmaker Lee Lynch as a DVD you're putting out. Who is Lee Lynch and why do you think people need to see his films?

Lee is this guy that I go to school with. I got to know him and he would talk to me for hours and hours about his movies. I thought this one movie was going to be epic, like *Magnolia*, or something, and it turned out to be two minutes long [laughs]. I was like, "Is this a joke? Is this for real?" I thought this kid was so awe-

some that he's so excited about everything he does. He's my favorite filmmaker—I watch his movies more than anything else. There is just something so great about them; he is just so charismatic. I don't know how the DVD is going to do. I'm going to try it, and if it bombs, it bombs. I'm at a point where I can help my friends out and that's my main motivation.

How long of a shelf life can you see Sound Virus having. How long can you keep at it?

The way it's going right now I can keep at it because it's pretty self-sufficient. It's not something I can live off, but it keeps the flow going. I've never taken a dollar out of the label. I've never even bought a cup of coffee with it. I feel guilty spending money that comes out of it. You'd have to sell so many records to even be able to live off it. I wouldn't want to think that way, like "Is this going to sell enough for me to pay rent?" As long as it stays this way and I can put out a record and pay for promotion and everything with label money, I'll keep doing it. —Gregory Adams ☺

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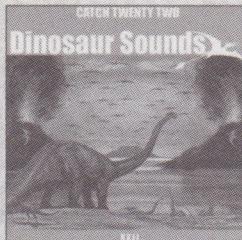
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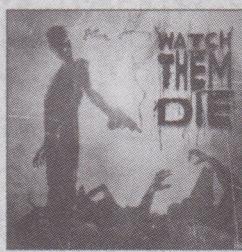
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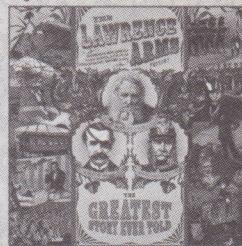
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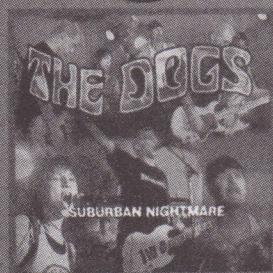
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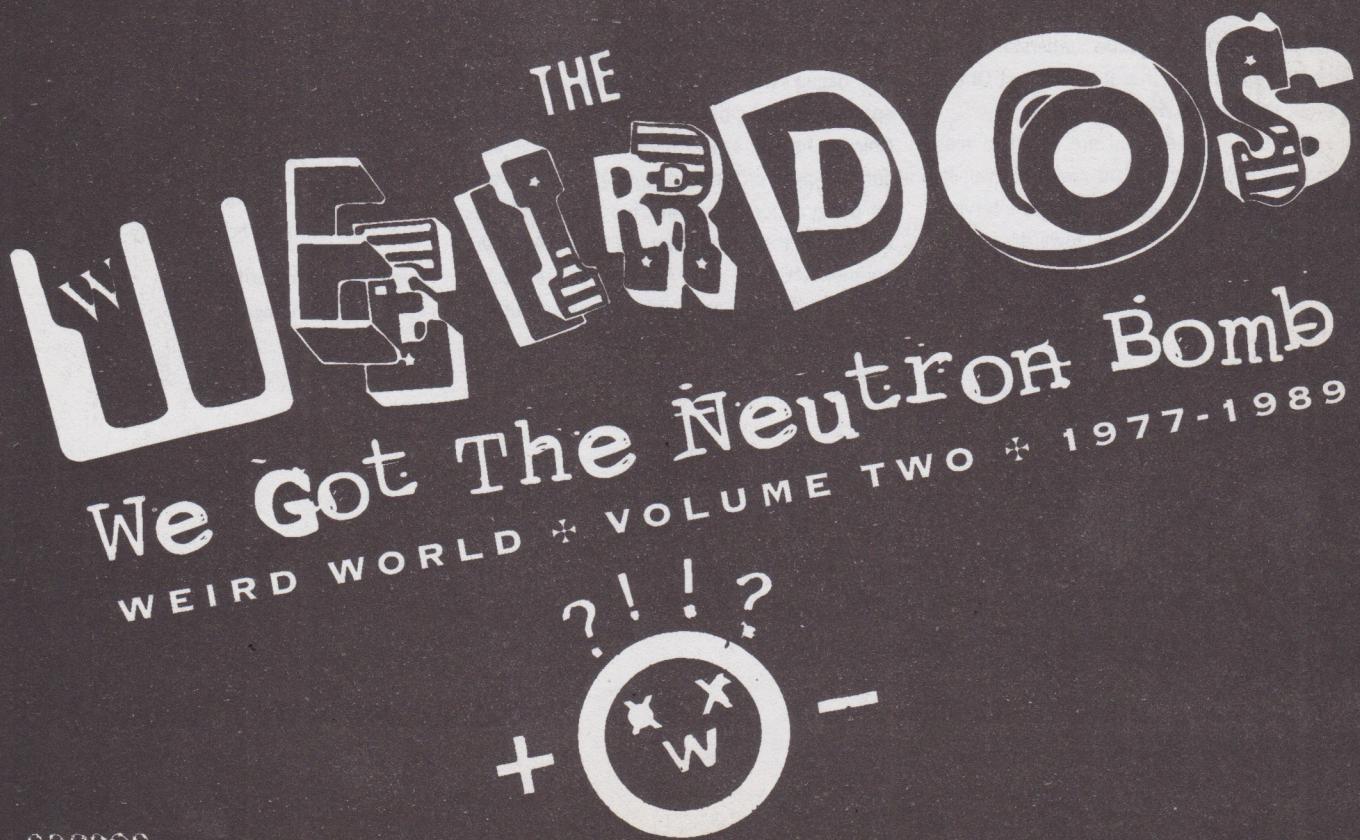


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"What are we becoming *Us Weekly*?"

—from an e-mail concerning this interview

The first time that I interviewed Conor Oberst he told me in no uncertain terms that he has never wanted to be famous—and that's never with, like, a capital "N." This was nearly a year and a half ago, and at the time I had traveled to Omaha to write a magazine article on what people have begun to refer to in hipster shorthand as the Saddle Creek Family, an expansive group of musicians who have collectively run their own everything for the past 10 years. That you've picked up an issue of *Punk Planet* probably negates an explanation of what all of this means, as Oberst and his friends have built one of the most successful and respected independent music scenes in recent memory out in America's heartland. You surely know by now that this is the same scene that is home to Cursive, the Faint, and both of Oberst's main musical visions: Bright Eyes and the rock-heavy Desaparecidos. And that, more importantly, it's the very same scene that you can currently find quivering beneath the media's bright spotlight. Over the four days I spent in Omaha back then, I talked to nearly everyone involved in Saddle Creek—the bands, the label owners, even the bartenders—and what little understanding I came home with was that it wasn't just Oberst who felt this way. It was everyone.

But the interview you are about to read isn't about everyone. Hell, it may not even be for everyone. By and large, this is an interview about one young man's rise toward celebrity and fame and, most confusingly, what he has done with those things as they have been inad-

vertently thrust upon him. You know, some real *Us Weekly* type shit. Since first meeting Oberst and his friends, I've kept in touch with most of them—watching as bands and projects that went overlooked even a year ago rose to national prominence. But it was always Conor whom I looked forward to speaking with. At the very least, he always seemed the most likely to be both afraid and aware of what he and his friends were up against. When he came through Los Angeles last fall on the first tour behind the fourth Bright Eyes disc, *Lifted Or The Story Is In The Soil Keep Your Ear To The Ground*, he did so backed by a 13-piece orchestra made up mostly of longtime companions. In a way, he was acknowledging what lay ahead by keeping his friends close and the drinks even closer.

That weekend he played tipsy to nearly 3,000 people, passing a bottle of red wine around onstage while openly denouncing the impending war against Iraq. He seemed sweetly scared in this moment of widespread acceptance, even though it was one that he thoroughly deserved after so many years of soul baring. From there, however, I began to lose track of the guy. Oberst and his friends spent the next six months on the road touring behind *Lifted*, and what I occasionally heard about those times was hardly encouraging. Soon people began whispering of unlikely incidents sprouting up at Oberst's various live shows. In Chicago he had a near meltdown onstage as a surly all-ages crowd unrelentingly heckled him for being a "rock star." In Ohio a group of kids turned up throwing water balloons. After yet another show in Los Angeles, the excitable crowd was abuzz about him sneaking out the

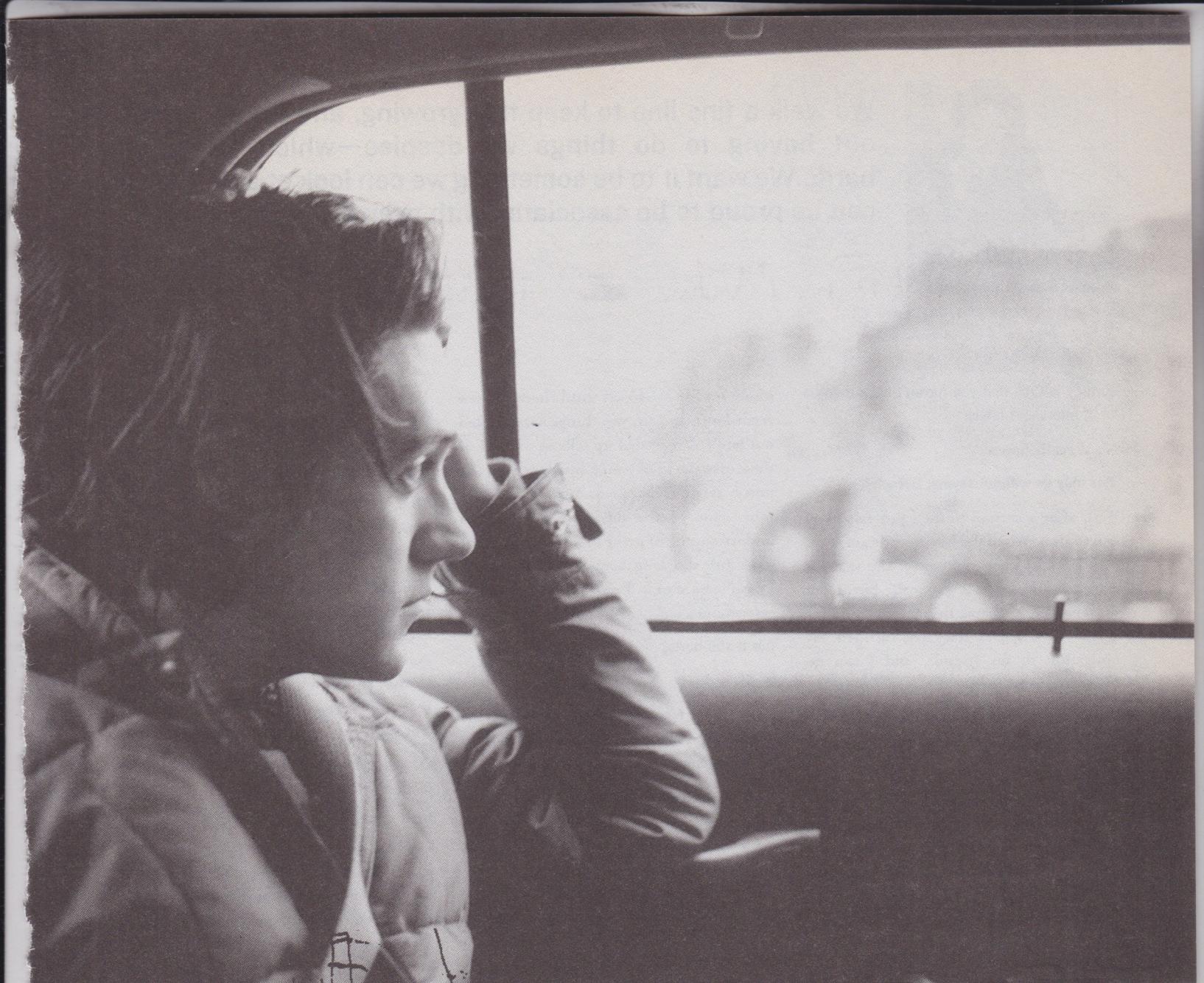
back door and into a limousine with Winona Rider. Soon that story was everywhere, filling the pages of slimy checkout store rags and making for a minor sound bite on hollow *Entertainment Tonight*-style television shows. There were photos, too, and they ended up just about everywhere, displaying an unknowing Oberst walking Ryder to her car with a hotel key in one hand, and a bottle of wine in the other.

The next time I would see Oberst, ironically, we would be pulling up to the same hotel parking lot where the photos were taken, as he had agreed to talk with *Punk Planet* in one of his only interviews since that incident.

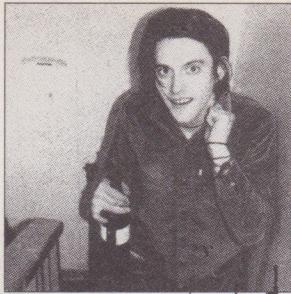
That afternoon, as Oberst and I drank glass after glass of red wine on the balcony of his friend's place in nearby West Hollywood, we talked about everything from his first show in Omaha to his first show on television to his first move outside of Nebraska and into the cluttered streets of Manhattan. If all of this sounds like the last thing you'd expect from *Punk Planet*, I'm not really sure what I can tell you. Despite Oberst's battles with fame, I think his story is an important one. When his obsessive fans call him the "voice of a generation"—or when glossy magazines portray him as some sort of 23-year-old version of Bob Dylan—I can understand the urge to roll your eyes. Just as long as you don't look away completely. After all, this is a story that Oberst is still very much in the process of writing, and no matter how long that takes—or how often he either flourishes or fumbles along the way—it's sure to reflect a lifetime of both honesty and integrity.

Interview by **Trevor Kelley**

Photos by **Butch Hogan**



CONOR O'BRIEN



We walk a fine line to keep this growing, and we do it without having to do things we despise—which is always hard...We want it to be something we can look at and that we can be proud to be associated with even if it is changing.

So they tell me that you haven't been doing a lot of interviews lately.

No, I really haven't.

This may go without saying, but why?

Well, after a certain point I just felt like I had to stop. When the last record came out, I did a lot of them right away, and that got extremely tiresome. I got really burnt out on repeating the same things over and over again. Now I feel like I've fulfilled my obligation to my friends, and I can do whatever I want for a while.

Were you surprised when we first started talking about doing this article on you?

I was definitely excited by it because I actually respect this magazine. Maybe it's going to be a surprise to other people because I've been in more mainstream publications or whatever, but . . . for a long time I was hesitant about accepting a lot of the attention I was receiving. I was really confused about what to do with it. The music part is simple: it's your life. You make records, you release records, and you go out and play shows because that's what you love to do. But what do you do with the rest of it—the more superficial aspects of being in the public eye? I feel like I'm still learning how to deal with it. I think there are a lot of positive things you can do in that position, you just have to be smart about it. You have to choose your battles, I suppose. As of late, that has become a concern. But I guess it comes with the territory, you know?

What do you think you've learned from that?

A lot of weird things have happened in my life this last year that have made this a little more difficult. That's why I haven't done a lot of interviews. I feel like there's not a

whole lot for me to say until there's a new record out, and the way things have worked out lately, I've ended up talking with all of these people who aren't interested in the music at all. That stems from this whole other side of the media that I had no understanding of prior to this record. That was a little shocking, actually. I can't say that I wasn't aware of it. I mean, I did know that existed but . . .

But it still hurts.

Yeah, it does.

Do you ever fear that as you get bigger, the way people connect with your music will end up getting smaller?

God, I really hope not. Of course, there will always be that phenomenon where you see a band playing in front of a hundred people and then you see them in front of a thousand people, and you're overcome by this feeling that you want to get it back to that place in front of those original hundred people. You want it to be a secret again. Despite how often the band comes up in press or despite how big the shows are that I play, I don't think that really should have any bearing on the way it feels when you listen to these songs. The songs should be enough to carry it through. It's like when I put on an Elvis Costello record. I know there are millions of people who love his songs, but at that moment when I'm listening to his music, I'm the one that loves his songs. With my success or whatever, I'm sure there will be a certain percentage of people who won't feel that way about it. But I don't think that we've done anything as a band to warrant that feeling of betrayal.

But surely you've felt that.

I don't know if I have. I really don't get that close to the kind of people who would think that way. All the friends I have are just happy to see things going well for me.

Sure, but there have been times recently where it's been quite obvious that people are feeling that way.

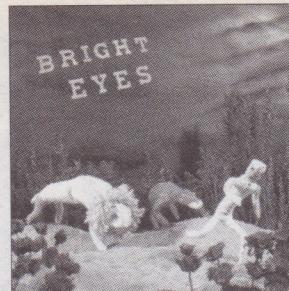
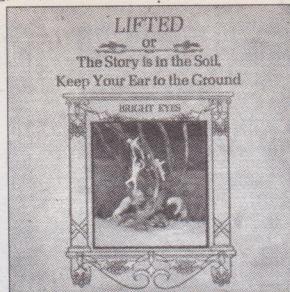
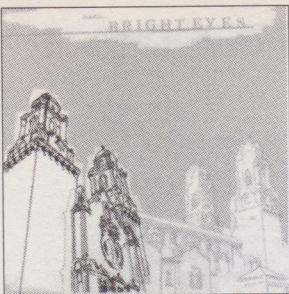
No, you're right. There have been some instances. People have come to shows recently and thrown water balloons at me. A little while back I had a full can of beer thrown at me—it was one of those tall boys, too, and it was unopened. *That hurt.* [laughs] But those are still pretty isolated incidents.

Do you want to talk about what happened the other night?

Well, we played at the Shortlist Awards in LA and, as a band, something we've been slowly moving towards is minimizing our involvement with Clear Channel. Lately, that's been really difficult. There have been a few times where we did 40-date tours and, literally, there were three or four Clear Channel shows because in certain cities there was *nowhere* else to play. For me, that's been really frustrating. So the other night just seemed like the right time to declare war, I guess. Toward the end of my little monologue, I made a sort of passing reference to George W. Bush. I compared my stance on Clear Channel to him saying, "You're either with us or against us." But that was more of a joke. I didn't mean to make such disparaging remarks about our dear President. [laughs]

Didn't someone spit at you?

Yeah, some guy came up and did that. It actually took me a while to figure out why that happened. It didn't seem like anyone



could get that worked up about what I said about Clear Channel. I think it was what I said about the President, not the Clear Channel remarks, because *everyone* hates Clear Channel. That's why it felt like the appropriate time to say that. That will definitely be the last Clear Channel show we will play, ever.

On your end, how is it possible to not grow resentful about situations like that—situations where someone is going as far as throwing something at you or running on stage to spit at you?

I just try and laugh it off. You can really learn a lot about yourself by doing that. You learn how to stay grounded or how to stay sane. Going on tour, where you are out advertising yourself as an entertainer, you are playing for people that care about you, which is great. But it can also suck because you're out there putting yourself into this other world where those things can happen. The more you are exposed to other people's notions of you, the more at risk you are of losing yourself or losing your own identity to those people. That is something I still struggle with.

When things like that happen, it must not even feel remotely real.

Not when you're watching them happen, no. It's kind of like ... [long pause]

This must be hard. I'm basically asking you to react to a version of yourself created by other people.

That's totally what it is. It's not me. I've had some unfortunate run-ins within the press in the last year, and, maybe that's what people are reacting to. I guess I've learned a lot about what it's like to be objectified because

of that. I had never even thought about that before. Now I've learned what happens when your character doesn't come through at all, and when you just become a caricature of yourself. There really is no way that you can respond to that. Once you become a little blurb in a huge magazine, of course they're not going to talk about the music you play or what it means to you. There's only one thing that those publications are interested in, and a lot of the people that are going to read those articles will never read anything else about what you do. That will be their only connection to you.

That's one of the reasons I wanted to do this interview, actually: I hardly see anyone talking about you as a musician anymore. What I see a lot of is people talking about you as . . . I don't know, a *celebrity*. Can you understand why that has happened?

I can definitely understand it. That happens to a lot of other people, and it has been far worse for a lot of those people. It's freaked me out from time to time, for sure, but I think I'm handling it well.

Were there ever times that you blamed yourself? Did you ever feel like there may have been some instances where you were making it worse?

I don't know. I've definitely learned to be more careful with myself. I guess I'm coming to the realization that there are people watching what I'm doing, and that I *have* to be more careful now. At the same time, I don't feel the need to please either side of this. I don't care if I please the mainstream press that wants to make you into some pin-up boy who dates actresses—actually, I definitely don't care if I please them—and on the other hand, I don't care if I please the

militant, indie rock, *Punk Planet* crowd who may want to believe you're something else entirely. All I can do is be myself and do what I want to do. Wherever that lands me is where I'll be.

Do you think people invest too much in you?

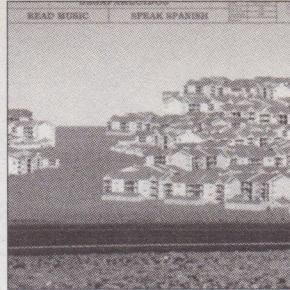
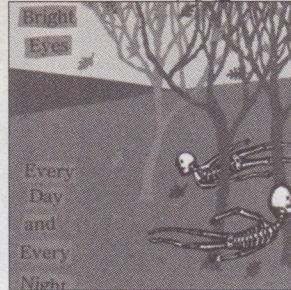
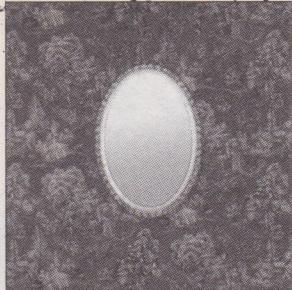
That's really a tough thing to say because when it comes to my music, I don't want to let people down. If my music is a big part of someone's life, I would like for them to be happy and like what I do with it. It seems that when people do like it, it becomes a part of their lives, which is great. But there are so many different connotations to that and different ways that it can affect you. I do think that it's hard when someone tries to bring that much of them to you. There really is nothing that I can do for those people. I certainly can't change what I'm doing for them. They're total strangers.

I just read somewhere recently that the only sorts of songs you're interested in writing at the moment are protest songs.

Yeah, that's true.

Is part of that because within those songs you don't have to be held accountable as Conor Oberst?

Yeah, that's probably part of it. I definitely feel like I'm in this period where I don't want to write about myself or my feelings or any of those things. I don't always want to be in that private, personal world. That's mostly what I was used to writing about. Right now, I feel like I am going to write about things that are more observational. Things that are less about one's inner-psych, and more about the world around you. All I can really do is write in the here and now.



The last time we sat down to do an interview was over a year ago, and I remember you were talking about moving to New York even back then.

[Laughs] I'm sure I was.

What took you so long?

It wasn't fear as much as it was realizing all the people that I'm going to miss. My best friend in the world is my cousin Ian. He lives with me in Nebraska, he plays in Desaparecidos with me. He knows that I don't like waking up in different cities every day and that I'd just rather be kicking it with him. But we have an understanding. I still have my house and my roommates in Nebraska and I have a place in New York now. I'm going to end up going back there all the time, because as far as recording and rehearsing and getting the band together, it's going to happen in Omaha. I know I'll be there enough. But now I won't feel as trapped.

How long did you struggle with that?

For a really long time, actually. This last winter, though, I went out to New York and stayed with my friend Nate for a few months, and that's when I really decided that I wanted to do it. For me, it's all about just feeling happy at the end of the day, and right now I really feel like I would be happier out there. I need to be by myself a little more. I want to be writing and reading and all of the other things that get harder to do in a town filled with people you haven't seen in a while that you're dying to talk to. I feel the best when I'm focused and my thoughts are very clear. You'd think being in New York, where it is complete mayhem all the time, wouldn't help with that. But for me it

does. When I was in Nebraska, my brain felt very scrambled. The chaos of the city definitely makes me feel more at ease in my head. New York really makes you feel more human, I think, because it forces you to interact with people from every aspect of society during every moment of the day. It's a lot harder for me to exist in my own little bubble.

This probably feels like ancient history by now, but can you still remember the first show you played in Omaha?

Totally. I remember it was at this place called Kilgore's, which was sort of like a coffee house and a bar where they put on theater performances. I just remember when I got up there how my knees were shaking, and my guitar was bouncing around. I could barely keep my hands still. That night Bill Hoover and Simon Joyner—who were both songwriters in Omaha that I always loved—were there, and I remember Ted Stevens [from Cursive] saying, "Dude, I'm not going to play my last song—I'm going to make you play it!" I thought he was joking, because he would always fuck around with me, then he really did it! When they told me that I should come back and play some more, I couldn't believe it. I felt so at home.

It doesn't seem like that feeling has ever really left you.

No, it hasn't. I really do feel like I have such a wide and deep base of support out there, whether it's with my friends or my family. I still have everyone out there, and if something were to go terribly wrong or I needed someone to talk to or someone who could help, they're always there. That's why all of us have been so lucky. We've always been

surrounded by people who are passionate about all aspects of this—whether it is the personal side, the business side, or the music-making side. For us, we've always worked around this idea of sticking together and setting small goals that we thought we could achieve.

How do you think you've managed to hold on to that all these years?

It hasn't been by any plan. [laughs] I know that I didn't have a plan about how to maintain this and I think that, because of that, it's always been the way it's had to be. We walk a fine line to keep this growing, and we do it without having to do things we despise—which is always hard. Making videos is hard. How much we interact with huge money-driven organizations is hard. But with whatever we do, we try and make it as good as we can and hope that it represents the music well. We're trying to be fair with all of these things as we're forced to deal with them. We want it to be something we can look at and that we can be proud to be associated with even if it is changing.

This may be a tougher question, but with all of these things changing as they are, in what ways do you think that some of that has been lost?

Honestly, this can be frustrating for me. When it's all said and done, the idea of truly independent music and do-it-yourself ventures *always* has to be compromised. DIY, in its most ideal form, is a wonderful thing. But right now we are being forced to find some sort of middle ground. Obtaining some sort of success and selling records are two things we are trying to do, but with that it gets to a point where you

We've always been surrounded by people who are passionate about all aspects of this—whether it is the personal side, the business side, or the music-making side. For us, we've always worked around this idea of sticking together and setting small goals that we thought we could achieve.

have to ask yourself where you will draw the line. [Saddle Creek owner] Robb Nansel is such a wonderful person, but one of his crutches is that he is *so* careful about changing it in any way. He is worried about it! [laughs] He wants it to be perfect.

But I think that's true with all of you. Whenever I talk to any of the bands or the people at the label, part of me feels this fear that if you change any of it, you'll end up ruining all of it.

There definitely were some scary moments where we were unsure of the fate of the label. For a while, it wasn't clear if everyone was going to stick around. But I think we're past that now, and for the foreseeable future everyone has agreed that it's best to be here and continue on in the same way. I think a lot of that is based out of friendship, but you're right: there's fear there, too. This business is a fucked up world to go into on your own.

How often do you think about that sort of stuff?

Everything we do with Saddle Creek and with the band we think about to death. We really want to present ourselves in a way that we feel is appropriate. But more importantly than that, there are certain things that we feel are right, and certain things we feel are wrong, and all we ever try to do in any situation is do what we feel is right. In one sense it doesn't matter how other people feel about how we handle our shit, because the only real way to operate anything is by doing what you feel is best. Besides, I'd like to think that our music and the way we operate as a band—especially from a business standpoint—is saying something meaningful. I love when someone critiques it, because I

don't think that there's much to critique. We've done this the same way forever.

This past June you played on *Letterman*. That was the first time any band on Saddle Creek had done something like that, right?

Yeah, it was.

What was the name of the song you played?

It's called "Trees Get Wheeled Away."

Why that song?

I wanted to play something with a little bit of dissent to it, instead of just going out there and playing a love song. The least I could do was add a little curve to it, and put that time to some sort of use. I could have just gone out there and played a pretty love song for the people on TV and I'm sure that it would have been fine. The label wanted me to do whatever I wanted, but there were people that were like, "Why don't you play 'Bowl Of Oranges'? That's the song you have a video for." But it never even occurred to me. The funny thing was that I had to send them the lyrics for approval beforehand. I didn't know how fascist they were at CBS or whatever, but I had to believe that they were at least a little fascist. [laughs]

There are definitely some lyrics in that song that you would think they would have been suspect of.

I thought that, too. But they cleared it, anyway.

The memory I have from watching it at home was this line toward the end—and I know I'm going to get this wrong—but there's a moment in there where you say something to the effect of "it's not who I've become, but what you

made me into."

Right, I know the part that you're talking about

Is that as black-and-white a response to the last year as it seems?

Yeah, it is. The first time we started playing that song out was on tour last fall—I was finishing it right before we left. I guess it was a pretty immediate reaction to all of that—more so than most of my other songs, anyway—and I definitely selected that song to play on national television specifically for the lyrics. I guess I think about them a lot. Like, just those first few lines: "Increments spike their blood where a mass of mud / Cucumbers cut to fit their eyes / So no one would know how tired they've grown / Of talking and telling their lies." [laughs] You probably know the rest.

To me, that whole song seems to be about holding on, in one way or another, to a sense of purity. Maybe it's the sense of purity we've been talking about in Omaha. Maybe it's the sense of purity that you suddenly lose once people start recognizing you as you walk down the street. But when I hear that song now, I think of those things and I wonder about what effect they've had. That's what was really striking about watching you play that song. I don't know. Maybe I'm totally on about something else here.

No, I think you're right on about it. Honestly, to hear you say that right now is so great. It's great that anyone would listen that closely to it. I should say cheers. [Holds an empty glass of wine high.] Well, if there was anything left in this thing. ☺

Rob Pennington has been an integral punk rock spokesman since the early 1990s. As the front man for Endpoint, he helped move the genre from an era of jock-core machismo toward an outwardly expressive phase. His lyrics spanned the gamut from social justice to personal scars that ran marrow-deep.

Now Pennington is back with another Louisville-based hardcore crew. Originally known as Black Widows, Black Cross has not only received rapid notoriety from its intriguing blend of musical styles and intense live performances, but for its equally powerful sense of lyrical relevance. Musically, the group is a fine-tuned machine. Brothers Ryan and Evan Patterson (both of National Acrobat fame) tackle the guitar and bass duties, while longtime Louisville percussionist Thommy Browne helps quarterback his comrades through each stark transition. Leading the pack is the amiable Pennington, whose lyrics and vocal gymnastics are as on-point as ever.

In a recent phone conversation, Pennington shared his ideas about everything from modern medicine and the environment to his special education teaching position. Aside from having an interesting insight into an increasingly corporate-influenced genre of music, his love for punk rock—warts and all—appears to be just as diligent as it was during his Black Flag-influenced salad days.

An important question lingers, however. Can Pennington once again help give this once-revolutionary genre of music another push toward the positive in a time when sassy brah-rockers appear to have the run of the palace? While it will take much more than one group to turn things around, Black Cross just might be the spark that sets all things abstaining from substance ablaze.

Interview by Brian Peterson

Photography by Ricardo Saporta

Dating back to Endpoint, your lyrics and your stage presence have always had deep-felt emotional impact. How do you continue to achieve this feeling over the years?

I always look towards things that are honestly bothering me or things that I am in the process of working out, so every time I play these songs they are reminders to myself about these things. It's also another way of getting them out of me and to be able to work on them. Everybody has things they need to work out and I have always felt very comfortable doing this through music. I guess music is therapy for me. What I value most from music is live performance. It's not just about putting out records for me—that's not something that's even that interesting. My lyrics come from honest, real feelings. I don't just sit down and go, "Everyone is pissed about this topic, so I better write about it." I'd rather wait and write a song that comes from a specific feeling or emotion that I have ownership over. I think that's why people might be able to relate to my music over the years.

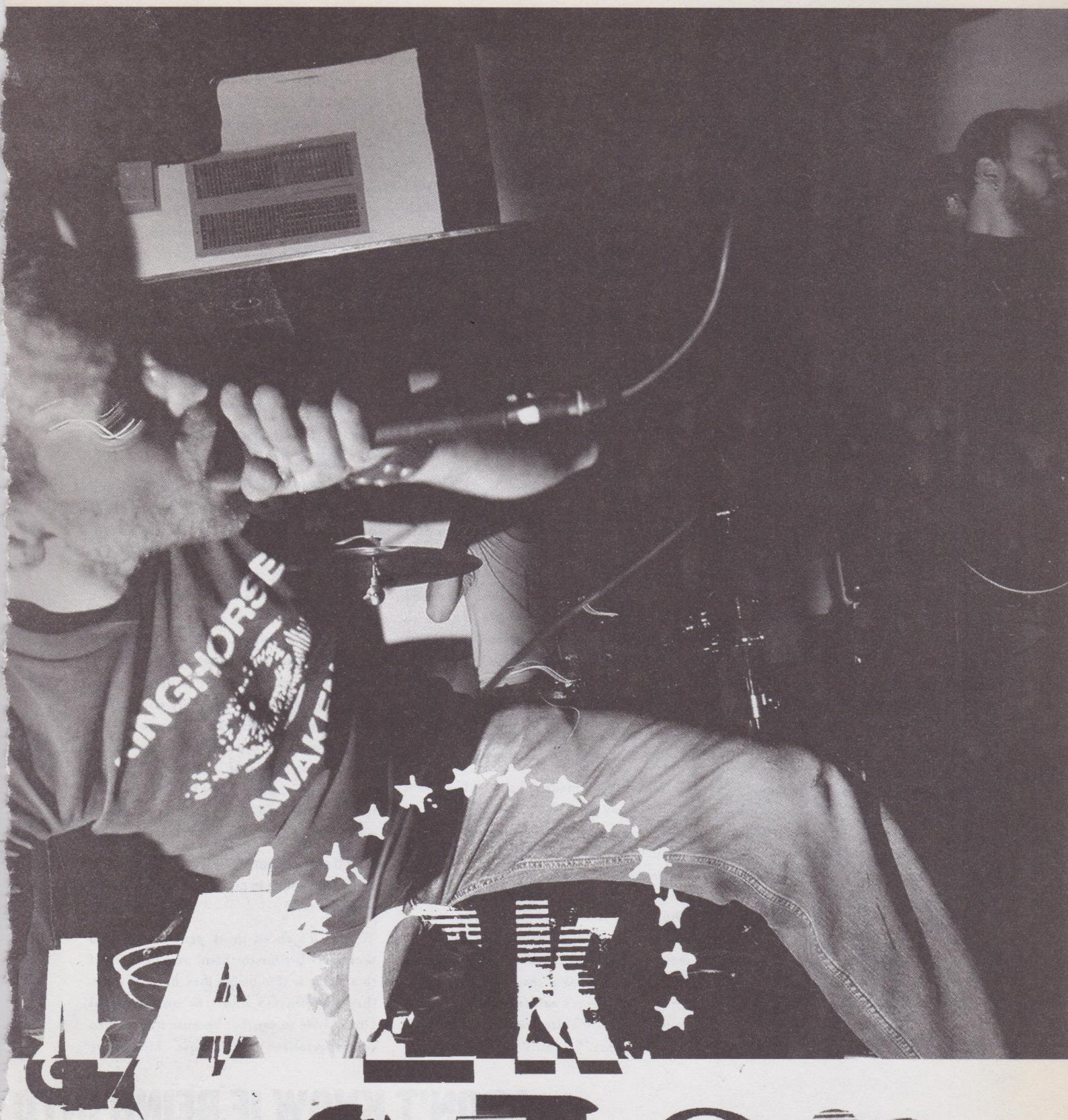
Have you found this process of "exorcising your demons" helpful?

Definitely! I believe strongly in moving things from the inside to the outside because they become much easier to deal with. Things that you keep inside will change and be hard to seek out and find. If I can talk about these things and be aware of them then I am able to work on them easier. ¶ "Screaming from the Top of the Stairs," for instance, is about some very personal family issues. Ever since I wrote that song I've felt guilty about it because I love my father a lot, but I've also been able to do a lot of work on that relationship.

Writing about it helped you reevaluate things?

Oh, yeah. When I first wrote it, I was kind of like, "Whoa, this came out of me?" It was obviously something I needed to work on. But sometimes I just write songs to remind me of things. One day something might make me furious, but during the rest of the week when I'm busy at work I might push it down and forget about it. Then when I play I remember, "This is something I need to think about!" Maybe it's a current issue per-





WINGHORSE AWAKEN

CROSS



taining to the environment that I live in—I don't want to ignore it and forget about it and fall asleep, so when I'm furious I write a song about my feelings so I can remember these circumstances every time we play.

You've been playing music for so long now. What do you do for a day job?

I'm a special education teacher. I work with kids that are perceived as different; kids that are fighting—right now—for their lives; fighting for the opportunity to be included with other kids. It's amazing. We've spent so many years talking about racism and sexism, and here's a whole population of people that don't even get valued as whole people a lot of the time. I love working with them! I think it's great to be a teacher and have an alternate view of things and be able to share information and help these kids out, but it's a hard job. It's been eight years for me now. What I do, specifically, is work for my school district in "inclusion." I have a lot of kids with disabilities that are in regular classrooms and I go around and help other teachers figure out how they can best work with them. A lot of time regular teachers won't have any special education background, and they'll get a child with some very severe behaviors and they won't know how to modify the curriculum. My job is to go in and fix that and help support those teachers. It's really interesting.

Do you see being a teacher as a natural progression with having a "punk rock" heritage?

Well, punk rock made me strong because it made me feel good about myself despite my differences, so I think I can pass that on through my teaching. In working with a special education population, I feel like I have a stronger opportunity to do that. Those kids face their whole lives with so much opposition. They need to be able to feel good about themselves and have some success. I think as a teacher I'm good at finding a student's existing levels of independence and focusing on that and building from there. ¶ I think my musical back-

ground and profession definitely tie in together somewhere. Maybe it's the type of person that I am, but it just made sense for me to get into this vocation. I don't know if being into punk rock makes me a better teacher, but, generally speaking, accepting and celebrating diversity makes you a happier person. But I'm not trying to write songs to change the world all by myself. I'm just writing songs about things that are important to me. Sometimes I have changed my own world by writing about something, but I try to learn as much as I can from others, too. Sometimes I get uneasy when people in punk rock put others on pedestals. I've had that happen before, believe it or not. [laughs] I'm not overly impressed with the stuff I do myself, so it always amazes me.

What is the difference between your outlook from your past to the present?

Well, I would say it's mostly experience and age. There are so many differences in what I do now and what I've done in the past—not just musically, but where I am in my life, which obviously impacts how I feel toward playing music. Definitely, to me, this is a progression. I mean, how could it not be, really? ¶ One thing I would say is that I'm not in as much pain now as I was when I was younger. When those first Endpoint songs were written, I didn't feel very good about myself. When I was telling people to "let yourself go" and "spread your wings," I was really telling *myself* that. Now, I feel like I'm finally there. I guess I feel like I've listened to a lot of my own advice and I'm a lot happier because of it. [laughs]

Does the new album's title – Art Offensive – tie into your wanting to push hardcore back to its aesthetic core?

To me, it's about those people that hold their beliefs dear to them, and because of that there is this badge they have to wear: they are either a misfit or an outcast. I almost hate to say that because it's been so commercialized—and those kids have

**I DON'T KNOW IF BEING INTO
TEACHER, BUT, GENERALLY SPEAKING,
DIVERSITY**

become targeted by commercialism—but there is a certain sense of beauty and ugliness that we've all found in punk rock. When I was in high school, I didn't fit in. I was punched by bullies, and the only thing that made me feel good at the time were my peers in this music who told me it was OK to be whatever I wanted to be and I didn't have to be like everyone else. Along with trying to improve the world around me, this has pretty much been the theme of my whole artistic career.

In terms of improving the world, I understand you have some opinions on the state of modern medicine?

Well, it started when I became vegan a long time ago. Then I got into taking Wing Chung Kung Fu, and one of my masters is a practitioner of Asian medicine and energy work. I started to really get into the holistic area of medicine. I think a search for a holistic medical understanding is just another part of being closer to the universe and understanding everything around us. If you're a lover of the environment and everyone around you, I think you need to be aware of the whole picture. This culture is just now looking into the body in that way.

I suppose it makes sense, as the cost of "Western" medicine is so outrageous!

Don't even talk about health care in this country! [laughs] We pay more than any other country in administrative costs for health care to insurance companies—it's about three times as much as the runner-up. As a teacher, I get great benefits, but I've noticed that even though I get raises every year, my check seems to get smaller and smaller because health care continues to shoot through the roof! Personally, I'm an advocate for universal health care. It's a crime that our whole country does not have health care. People who need treatment can not get it in a lot of cases. This surely says something about our culture and our priorities. I know all the arguments against national health care, but you know there

would still be privatized health care too, so people that could afford it and wanted different health care would still be able to find it. I also think health care should include services like acupuncture and herbal medicines. The practitioners in these fields should be supported as well. They have been doing research on this in China for a long time, and it's interesting how they approach things; they look at both sides. For instance, if you have a certain type of ailment, they might recommend you go the more "Western" medical route, but for something else they might treat it naturally. I think we should look at things in this way, too. It's not like we're defending "Western" medicine against "Eastern" practices. There needs to be a combination of both to keep people healthier.

Yeah, I mean since medicine and technology are, almost by definition, cutting-edge fields that push boundaries, it just makes sense for people to look toward the alternatives and toward the future.

I know we spend a lot of time screaming about political issues. But we also need to look at things that make us better people. I know that some people say that if we change political structures then everyone will be happier, but I believe everyone needs to be happy with themselves first. I know a lot of people who are wonderful political advocates for good things, but they sometimes end up angry and frustrated with the world and die miserable. I think there needs to be a balance between looking out for the world and looking out for *yourself*. I think a really good punk rock way to do that is to take a deeper look into alternative therapies and medicines; to try and wean yourself off of taking antibiotics and aspirin non-stop; and take a look at some other things that you can do with your diet. People should explore these things and look at ways to go "against the grain" in other parts of their lives. ☺



**PUNK ROCK MAKES ME A BETTER
ACCEPTING AND CELEBRATING
MAKES YOU A HAPPIER PERSON.**





In the 1920s, Beale Street was the wildest, sleaziest street in Memphis, Tennessee. Every night when the sun went down the streets filled with hookers, gamblers, pickpockets, drunks, and a whole array of other folks looking for trouble and a good time. Historians say that Beale Street was the work-bench of blues. For years the sidewalks were lined with nightclubs that nourished the talents of WC Handy, BB King, Memphis Minnie McCoy and a whole host of others. Money flowed free on Beale Street back then, but by the 1970s the historic strip had become a ghost town. Most of the decaying buildings had been abandoned or foreclosed and all the clubs had been shut down. So the city of Memphis bought up three blocks and designed a Beale Street revival to inject a little life back into the drooping Memphis tourism industry.

Chetley Weise was 15 when Beale Street was coming out of its coma. He and his friends used to sneak out of the clean, white-picket-fenced borders of Germantown to see what the city was cooking up. New club owners, eager to

fill their venues, left their doors wide open to all comers. As a result, the blues slipped in under Chetley's skin at a young age and he's been hooked ever since.

Today, he's one half of the punk/blues duo, the Immortal Lee County Killers. Their third record, *Love is a Charm of Powerful Trouble*, came out earlier this year on Estrus Records. He took some time to talk about his music, his family and life in general.

Interview by **Jennie Tatone**

Could you tell me what it was like for you to grow up in Germantown?

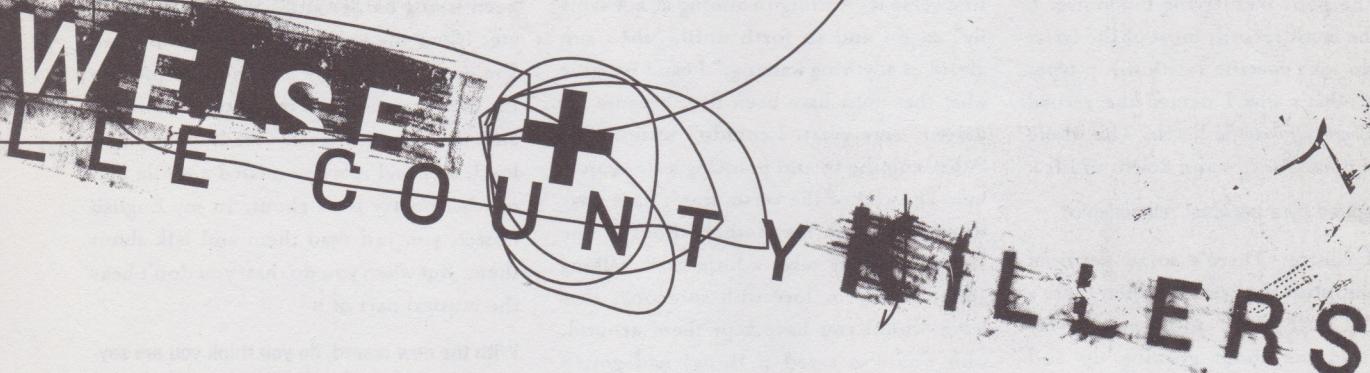
Germantown is a very safe place to be. It was suburban America: middle- to upper-class, mostly white. I'm not going to condemn it. My folks were doing the best that they could for themselves and us. They weren't into the politics of suburbia, we were just there. ¶ I've read interviews with Richard Hell, David Bowie, and the Rolling Stones—all of whom had similar backgrounds. Punk rock allowed them to

grow and learn to be the people they wanted to be. That's a big part of why music's good for me too. It got me to look at things, and gave me things to get into. When I was in high school, my friends and I would go to Beale Street, because that was the easy place to go and hang out and see all kinds of different things. There were all these crazy characters and street musicians that I'd go to see all the time. I really enjoyed what they played and all the craziness that was always happening around them.

Were you exposed to much blues before that?

A little bit, but not really. I started listening to blues when I was 12 or 13 years old. Neither of my parents were musicians, they just had some Elvis records around the house—in Memphis, that's kind of a given. With a lot of things, I think I'm borderline obsessive-compulsive; if I find something I like, I end up going 110 percent with it. Once I got hooked on the blues, I've been fanatical about it ever since.

**"I WANTED TO DO OUR BEST TO TAKE BLUES IN A DIFFERENT DIRECTION
A POSITIVE DIRECTION"**



Did you have brothers and sisters?

I have a younger sister and she has taken a completely different route in life than I have.

What did she end up doing?

She went to school and got a degree in art history and then she went back and got a graduate degree in interior design. She's a natural at just about everything she tries. She picked up photography one day and not even a month later, she won some awards in a photography competition in Memphis. She did the same thing with painting. If she had gotten into music, probably no one would've cared about what I was doing.

You're in Alabama now. When did you move away?

I came down to Auburn University for school.

How long were you in school for?

I got my masters degree in economics and

ended up teaching too. I was actually in the PhD program and dropped out when I got to the point that I could pay my bills playing music.

Wow—that's a lot of work to have these things going on at once. What got you interested in economics?

Economics is a subject that a lot of people have a lot of misconceptions about. Let me tell you what economics is *not*; that usually clears it up. The study of economic theory really has *nothing* to do with dollars and cents and checkbooks or stock markets. Economics has to do with human behavior and people's incentives. It asks questions like, what motivates human behavior and what is the motive behind profit? Why are some people self-interested while others are communally interested? We also explore why Mother Theresa would do charitable work or why people enter into marriages. I did my thesis on the drug war and why it will inevitably fail.

It kind of already has.

Yeah. I felt like a lot of the world's problems always have significant economic elements and I wanted to understand all that. I wanted to understand politics more thoroughly and a huge chunk of that is economics. I was eager to try to figure some stuff out.

Does that thinking—the economics and politics—factor into your songwriting?

Absolutely. I think the most important part of blues and punk and rock and roll music is that the person writes what they know about. For punk to be good and for blues to be good it has to be *honest*. Honesty sometimes doesn't mean it's correct, but when I write a song everything that I do and everything that I am is part of that song one way or another. So when I say I sing about economics or politics, I'm not singing, "when price goes up, quantity goes down." [laughs] Instead, I've studied a certain situation and have taken inspiration from that situation

“I THINK THE MOST IMPORTANT PART OF BLUES AND PUNK AND ROCK AND ROLL MUSIC IS THAT THE PERSON WRITES WHAT THEY KNOW ABOUT. FOR PUNK TO BE GOOD AND FOR BLUES TO BE GOOD IT HAS TO BE HONEST.”



and written a song about it. After all, one of the greatest themes in rock'n'roll and blues is the poor man trying to survive. ¶ But on the latest record, most of the lyrics have to do with specific relationship types of things, that's why I named the record *Love Is A Charm Of Powerful Trouble*. The whole record explores the ups and downs of life.

Was it inspired by a personal relationship?

Yeah, of course. There's some personal relationship stuff in there, but then there's also some stuff about some stories my mother told me about growing up and some stuff that's happened with JR and other people. It's not just me. I don't think I could write a whole album about me, that'd just be boring.

Do you and JR both write lyrics?

JR does write some lyrics, although none of the songs on this particular record are completely by JR. But he's in the songs in other ways. Like the song "She's Not Afraid Of Anything Walking," we were driving down the road one day and talking about a friend of ours and he said, "Yeah, she's not afraid of anything walking" and I just filed that away and pulled a song out of it.

That was actually one of the songs I wanted to ask you about. Could you tell me what it means?

That song is a conglomeration of different people's experiences. The first verse is actually inspired by my mother. When she was young, her mother left her real father because her father came out with a shotgun and held the whole family at gunpoint.

After that, her mother—my grandmother—took the kids and hit the road. So that's the first verse is "A shotgun aiming at her family" so on and so forth until, "she's not afraid of anything walking." I can't imagine what that must have been like, because my parents were great. I couldn't imagine my father coming in and pointing a shotgun at me. The rest of the verses don't have anything to do with my mother, though. The rest of the song takes a little twist, talking about falling in love with someone, they leave, could you have kept them around, who would've cared if things had gotten bad, if they stayed maybe we could've worked it out. That always happens in relationships: should I stay or should I go? In the three short verses, I'm trying to explore that dilemma

That's great. I love hearing the stories behind songs. While we're talking songs, I also wanted you to talk about "Love Is A Charm."

That song was inspired by a line from a Williams Carlos Williams poem: "Night is a room darkened for lovers." That's a great line, but I can't take credit for it. The song takes it one step further, though. Williams had it in the plural, but the song is about just one person in that room. It's very, very lonely. The song works its way out that the person in the song is worried about being alone and problems with affection. But the person keeps on going 'cause there's a chance we won't be alone; he or she won't be alone in this room darkened for lovers.

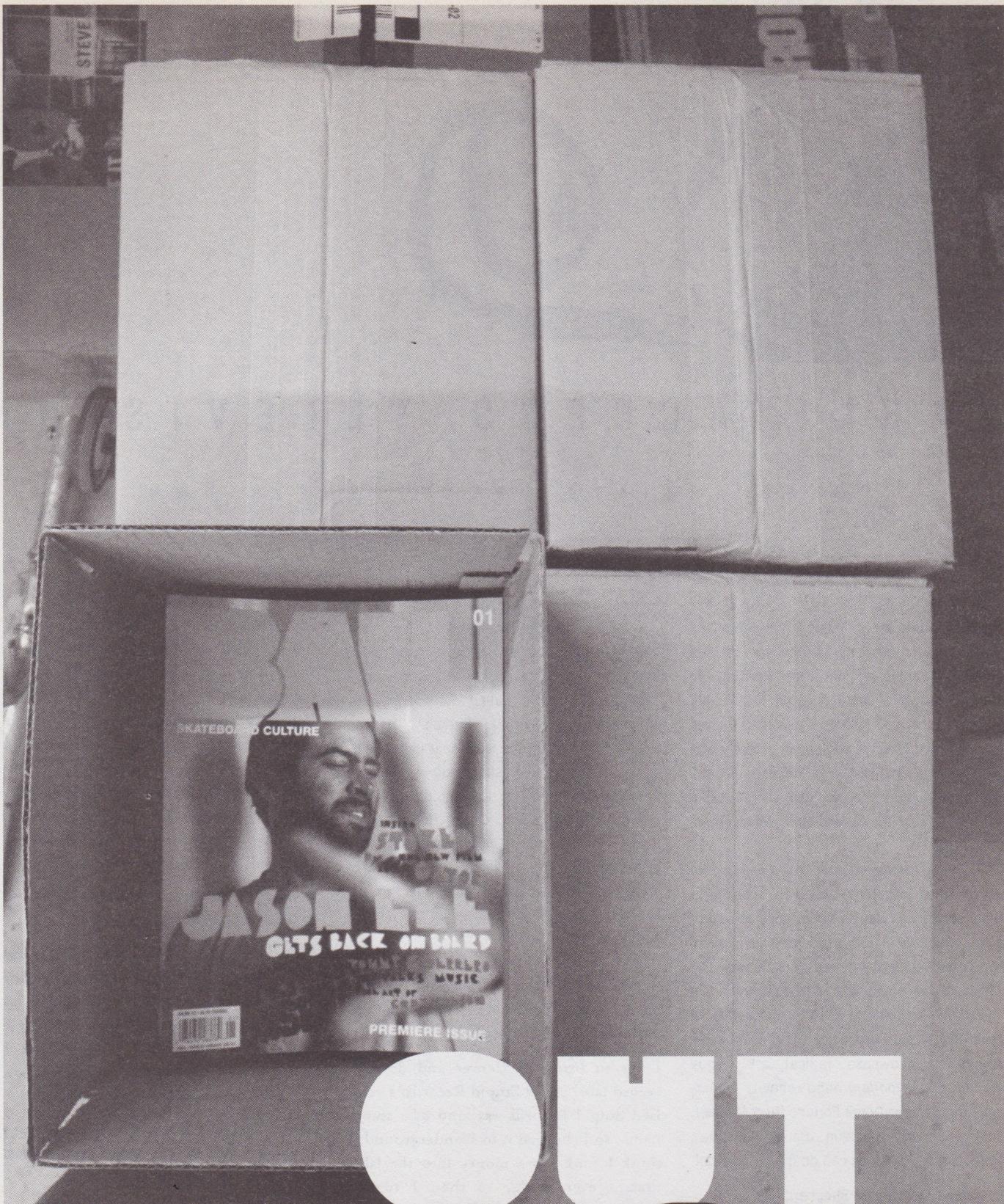
How did you come across the poem?

I'm one of those pretentious art guys. No,

that's just a joke. [laughs] I think poetry is really great. That's one artform that I've been trying harder and harder to appreciate. I love the wordplay that poets do and I've been trying more and more to pick up the music intonations in poetry. In our day and age, no one really reads poetry out loud, so I feel like I've missed a whole half of what poetry is all about. In my English classes, you just read them and talk about them. But when you do that, you don't hear the musical part of it.

With the new record, do you think you are saying that you really are a blues band, rather than a rock band?

In my mind, the Killers aren't just a blues band, even though we left a couple of our heavier rock'n'roll songs off this record. I wanted to make this a *definitive* punk blues record. I wanted to do our best to take blues in a different direction—a positive direction, hopefully, but that's for everyone else to decide. I also really wanted to put some acoustic tracks on there, because I wanted people to hear that aspect of our band as a testament to our roots. Those acoustic songs are a little bit more traditional-sounding as far as Delta blues goes. We wanted to add that dynamic to the record; to have very loud, bombastic songs and then the next song takes it to a whole different place. The acoustic part has been forgotten in a lot of bands. It's all very loud and filled with energy and I love that, obviously, but I also think there's other parts of blues and rock'n'roll that people are forgetting. ☺



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CABLE ACCESS TELEVISION

THREE ARTISTS CREATE THEIR OWN TV.

Cable access television is one of the last bastions of free speech and democracy on your television. In general, to get a show on your local cable access station, you just have to attend a class to learn how to use the equipment properly, and sign up for a time slot. And, unlike radio, the rules governing what you can do on cable access are fairly lax (depending on where you're airing, that is).

The following trio of DIY video artists demonstrate just how easy—and exciting—cable access can be. Before creating their programs, they weren't filmmakers—two of them had never even really picked up a camera! But with a little ingenuity, the right tools, and a few hours spent learning to edit and shoot, they've been able to put their ideas to TV, using cable access to showcase radical art (Cindy Wonderful's *Wonderground* show), underground musicians (Virgil Porter's *Burn My Eye*), and gender transgression (Sarah Adorable's *Malaqueerche*). If they can do it, you can too!

Interviews by Julianne Shepherd

Illustration by Chris Sloboda

Cindy Wonderful

Cindy Wonderful is an Olympia-based video artist, rapper, and musician. She produces a cable-access show called *Wonderground*, which airs in Olympia, Berkeley, Denver, Chapel Hill, and on the web. Featuring underground filmmakers, music videos by everyone from Sleater Kinney to underground hip-hop crew the Shapeshifters, concert footage, and radical art and politics, *Wonderground* is an incredibly fun show to watch, both in terms of its breadth and because it recognizes that the fun of art is that it's malleable and always recreated by the viewer.

***Wonderground* seems really organic and raw, but still well-made. What prompted you to do the show in the first place?**

I was in living in Denver and doing a record label called Stupid Records. I realized Stupid Records was kind of a stupid name, so I changed it to *Wonderground*. I think I sunk more money into the label than I ever made, so then I turned *Wonderground* into an all-ages venue and recording studio. It was a rock and roll compound; we had all kinds of bands there all the time. But it closed and I had to move

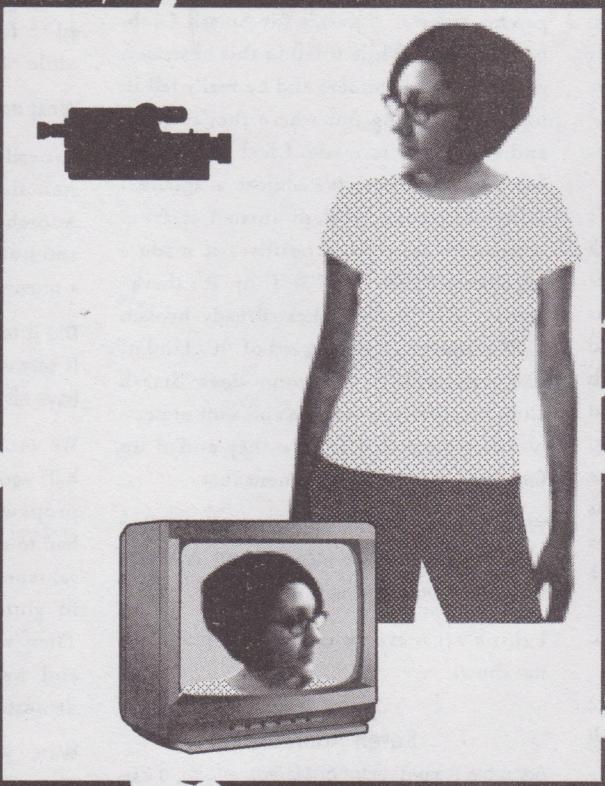
back into my parents' house. That's when I learned film—from my dad. ¶ I've been doing *Wonderland* as a cable access show for a year and a half now. I started on Denver Cable Access and then I moved to Olympia and started showing it here. I met people in Portland and they started showing it, and then I knew someone in Berkeley who started showing it on cable access there. And now it's going to start airing in Chapel Hill, and it'll be webcast, too.

How do you decide what content makes it on an episode of *Wonderground*?

Basically it's short films, music videos, and sometimes interviews. I haven't done many interviews so far—it's hard for me to do interviews with bands or famous people 'cause I don't feel like I'm very good at it. I interviewed [LA rapper] Busdriver on Episode 15, but I knew him already.

Do you film most of the content yourself? It's so diverse, with all the experimental videos, mini-films, and live concerts such.

I do most of it, but I have other people's short films on there too. I don't even own a TV! The main reason I like to do the show is because I feel like I watched *way* too much



TV when I was younger. I feel like my show is on to save the people who are stuck watching TV. If people are into my show and find out about something they never knew about before, or they find out they can do what I'm doing—even if they don't like it—maybe it will inspire them to do something. I'd like my show to be about real people doing cool stuff. I don't think you get much of that on television.

Except you do get to see that kind of stuff all the time on cable access.

I think cable access is really cool. My dad runs a video production business where he makes training tapes and stuff like that. Sometimes he'll freelance for *Hard Copy* or something, but mostly he makes industrial tapes and different stuff for like, OSHA. When I was 14, he tried to get me to do a cable access show and I wasn't interested at all. But when I moved back in to my parents' house and didn't have the venue anymore, I felt like I was exposed to so much cool, underground art and music that to not do something with all of it would be a shame. So my dad taught me how to edit and I *loved* editing. Plus, I get to show my band's videos all the time! ¶ One thing about cable access is that, depending on where you live, there are no rules. I consider it the most punk rock medium out there. The radio is regulated—even college and community radio stations have rules they have to abide by. But with cable access, you're responsible for what you show. I exercise as much freedom as I can on *Wonderground*.

Do you consider yourself a video artist?

Yeah, I do, but I think *Wonderground* is more of a mixtape and diary at the same time; each episode is whatever I'm going through and working on that month. For two episodes, I'm doing "*Wonderground Home Theater Presents*," where I'll take my time

on the show and just show a whole little movie. ¶ But the segments I like doing most are "Smash Club." I'm gonna do one on this girl in town who smashes all of her dishes on a regular basis. That's the more common of her quirks, anyway. It's not really a fetish but whatever—she just likes smashing things.

In the "Smash Club" segments, you show various people smashing things with a sledgehammer, like typewriters. How did that start?

This guy I know, Tony, started Smash Club. I feel like he could've ended up a psycho killer if it wasn't for Smash Club, because after awhile it led to this obsession with axes and hammers and he really fell in love with finding out where they're from and where they're made. I feel like smashing stuff, to him, it's almost a spiritual thing. Once he kind of turned it from anger into something positive, it made a big change in his life. For Tony, it's therapeutic. He just smashes already-broken stuff or stuff he's getting rid of. It's kind of like composting. Everyone does Smash Club for different reasons and a lot of people were surprised at how they ended up feeling. I wanted to document that.

What I most like about *Wonderground* is that it really captures the idea that art is everywhere, without shoving it in your face.

I think art is everywhere; I just put it on my show.

Sarah Adorable

Adorable is co-director of *Malaqueerche*, a 26-minute short film about queer gangs which explores transgressive gender identity. In the film, "The Mullets" gang kidnaps the drummer of "The Mohawks" gang in order to ruin their status as toughest queer gang in town. Antics

and hijinx ensue including a tire-shredder made entirely of buttplugs, a sexy double-crosser [played by Adorable herself], and lots of really funny Jimmy Stewart-sounding accents. *Malaqueerche* has been making the cable access rounds since it was completed.

What first inspired you to make *Malaqueerche*?

Both co-director Devin Devine and I are from Chicago, but we moved to Olympia and found ourselves immersed in this amazing queer community. We heard there used to be queer gangs here, and we decided to form a short-lived queer gang for a while called The Vicious Adorables.

What does a queer gang do, exactly?

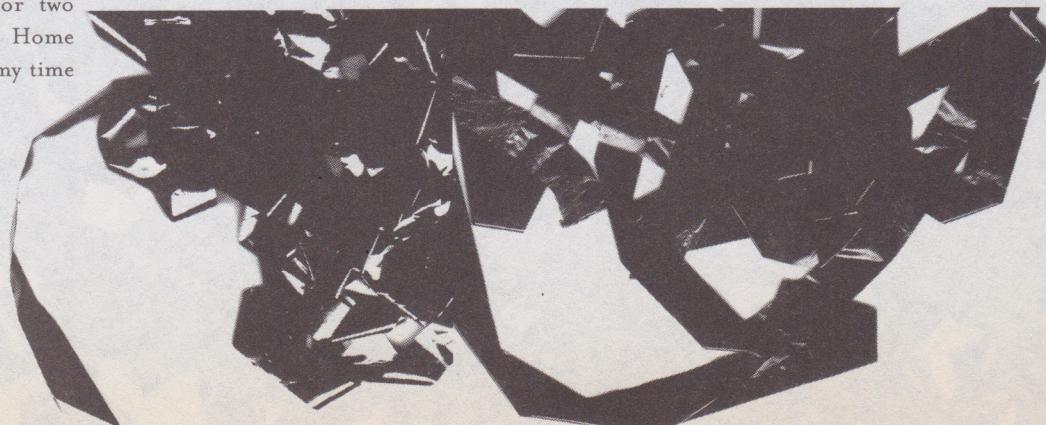
Basically we rode around at night, made stencils and painted "The Vicious Adorables will pervert you" on the sidewalk and stuff. After that, we just wanted to write a movie about queer gangs.

Did it take you a long time to make the film? It seems really stylized, editing-wise, and you have all those queer gangs in wacky costumes.

We wrote the script probably a year and a half ago. We had some pretty outrageous props we worked on for awhile, though. We had to make 25 butt plugs—we used electrical tape, sprayed with adhesive and covered in glitter. Some were actual butt plugs. Then we made the shimmering Fag Bat, and we made Drumchucks—two regular drumsticks hooked together with a chain.

Were you a video artist before making *Malaqueerche*?

No, I hadn't even used a camera before, and I *certainly* hadn't used any editing equipment either. But I was really inspired by moving to Olympia. Even before I moved



here, I was close friends with people in Olympia who were independent filmmakers and were making short films and all sorts of awesome stuff. When I moved here, Devin was in school at Evergreen doing film and had all this access to equipment and I took advantage of it. I just wanted to make a film about queers. And once I decided that, I thought the queer gang thing was so tough and awesome! ¶ I'm also interested in gender identity and different ways of expressing your gender, and that's how the two gangs came to be themselves but in drag [both gangs are played by the same actors]. I wanted to play with identity. ¶ The other thing that inspired me about coming to Olympia is that not only is the whole town full of awesome queers, amazing music, and cool people in general, but people are always doing *really* cool stuff! Films, art, organizing, secret cafés, creating venues in houses. The community is really supportive.

How does Olympia compare to Chicago for you?

Chicago's a great place, but I feel like if I was still living in Chicago, people would say, "You're going to make a film? But you don't really know *anything* about filmmaking." In Olympia, people will think it is awesome, and they'll help you do it. That's one of the other ideas in the film—that anyone can be a rock star. Anyone can be their own queer icon. Everyone has it in them.

Virgil Porter

Virgil Porter is the co-creator of *Burn My Eye*, a cable access show based in San Francisco with interviews and live footage of bands from the Bay Area. Past guests have included Erase Errata, Deerhoof, Numbers, Total Shutdown, and Pink and Brown. *Burn My Eye* is currently on a short hiatus, but Porter has released a DVD compiling the best of the show.

IT'S INCREDIBLE HOW ACCESSIBLE VIDEO PRODUCTION HAS BECOME IN JUST THE LAST THREE OR FOUR YEARS...ALL IT TAKES IS YOU GO DOWN THERE, THEY TELL YOU HOW IT WORKS, AND YOU CAN USE THEIR EQUIPMENT.

What prompted you to start *Burn My Eye*?

I got in my head after I watched a bunch of old Live at Target videos and realized that somebody needed to be doing something like that today since there are an overwhelming amount of mind-numbingly *insane* bands hanging around the Bay Area. ¶ I also wanted to learn how to edit video. I had a little experience with video editing and absolutely *zero* using a camcorder. I probably could have taken a class, but agreeing to produce a monthly show forced me to not only learn how to edit, but also to continue refining those skills since there was a deadline involved. ¶ It's incredible how accessible video production has become in just the last three or four years. I make *Burn My Eye* on a Windows box I assembled for about \$500 and a camera that cost \$350. You can get it done even cheaper now since a lot more cameras are coming onto the used market and computer/hardware prices are continuing to drop into the basement. The bad thing is the more you get into it, the more you start to become an equipment geek.

I really like the idea that you're documenting your community, that you're filming the bands that are playing around you right now. How do you choose the bands for the show?

We choose bands because we like their music. That's it. I'm not trying to play the typical music marketplace game where people want to "break" bands and be popular and make money. This music scene is a big section of our culture that I honestly just love to death. Some people get their rocks off admiring old stamps and oil paintings. I guess this music is what does that for me.

So with the release of the *Burn My Eye* DVD, is that it for *Burn My Eye* on cable access?

I just had to take a while off. I was working so much and burning myself out. [Co-cre-

ator] George Chen and I are getting together and planning out when we're gonna do it again.

How did you get your show on cable access without having any experience producing or filming a show?

All it takes is you go down there, they tell you how it works, and you can use their equipment. I'm kind of a geek, so I built the editing machine at my house. We would make the tape, and they would air it. They have a weird system that makes it really fair with a lottery that dictates what slot you get. Everyone gets a chance; the only thing is you're not guaranteed to get the same slot each time you're up for it. But you can sign up for three years at a time if you're really gonna go through with it that long. ¶ Cable access is a great thing. You know how cable access was set up? It was to allow cable companies to have a monopoly in a metro area. But they said, "You have to allocate some space on the channels as a public service and fund it." Like, "Sure, you get the entire market, but you have to subsidize a way for people to broadcast."

And you can pretty much air anything? You don't have to exert restraint or self-censor your content?

It differs in different places, but here in San Francisco, you're responsible for your own content. They ask you to put adult stuff on after 11 pm, but regardless of that, they aren't going to ask you turn it off. I mean, this is San Francisco; there was a show for the first four months after mine called *Bavonia*, I felt so insignificant airing before it! It was this guy who would wear a Viking cap and they blue-screened him so he would be in front of '60s porn and just take calls from people doing shout outs or asking questions. They didn't even get kicked off; I think they stopped because they just got tired of doing it. ☺

My jaw dropped, my eyes like Frisbees. I'm standing in a dark corner of the Subterranean in Wicker Park, and the Neal Pollack Invasion is halfway through their first song. This is not the mild-mannered Neal Pollack that used to spend most of his evenings sipping coffee in a coffee shop that was decorated like my grandmother's living room, grumbling about the changing face of Chicago's neighborhoods and writing thoughtful stories about it for Chicago's alternative weekly. This Neal Pollack is drunk, wild, and half-naked. His black curls are slick with sweat and beer. He's singing his goddamn heart out. Elvis sang "Hava Nagila" for this Neal Pollack at his Bar Mitzvah in 1954. This Neal Pollack popped Iggy Pop's cherry on a school night in the Algiers Motel in 1966. This is Neal Pollack: the World's Greatest Living Rock Novelist.

After he steps off stage, the junkie rock star melts away and the old Neal, the *real* Neal slips his T-shirt over his head and begins to move to the back of the room. He asks the bartender for a cup of water, and then grabs a pen to sign copies of his third book, *Never Mind the Pollacks*. This is no ordinary book tour, but then again Neal Pollack is no ordinary writer. He's published three books in three years, and at one time or another his own fans have doubted his very existence.

The confusion began when McSweeney's published a collection of his parodies in September 2000. He and Dave Eggers decided to name the hero of these first-person narratives "Neal Pollack." *The Neal Pollack Anthology of American Literature* received countless angry and/or confused reviews. Three years and two incarnations later, people continue to ask *who is this Neal Pollack guy anyway?* Truth be told, Neal is many things to many people: satirist, father, author, rock star, househusband, and bionic-embedded journalist charged with sav-

ing the American people from imminent destruction. Neal is not interested in being ordinary, and he's willing to try just about anything in his writing, his touring, and all of his side projects. In a short time he has shown the skeptics that he is more than a "one-trick retardo pony."

Interview by Cate Levinson

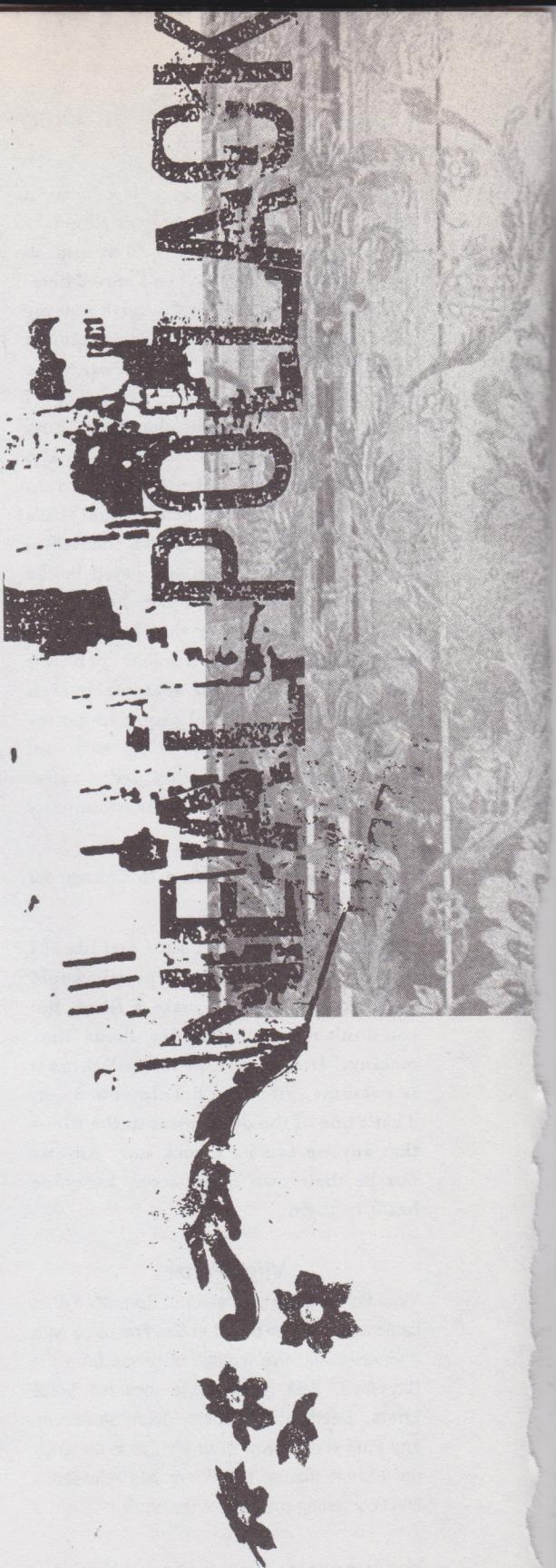
Photos by Andrew Ballantyne

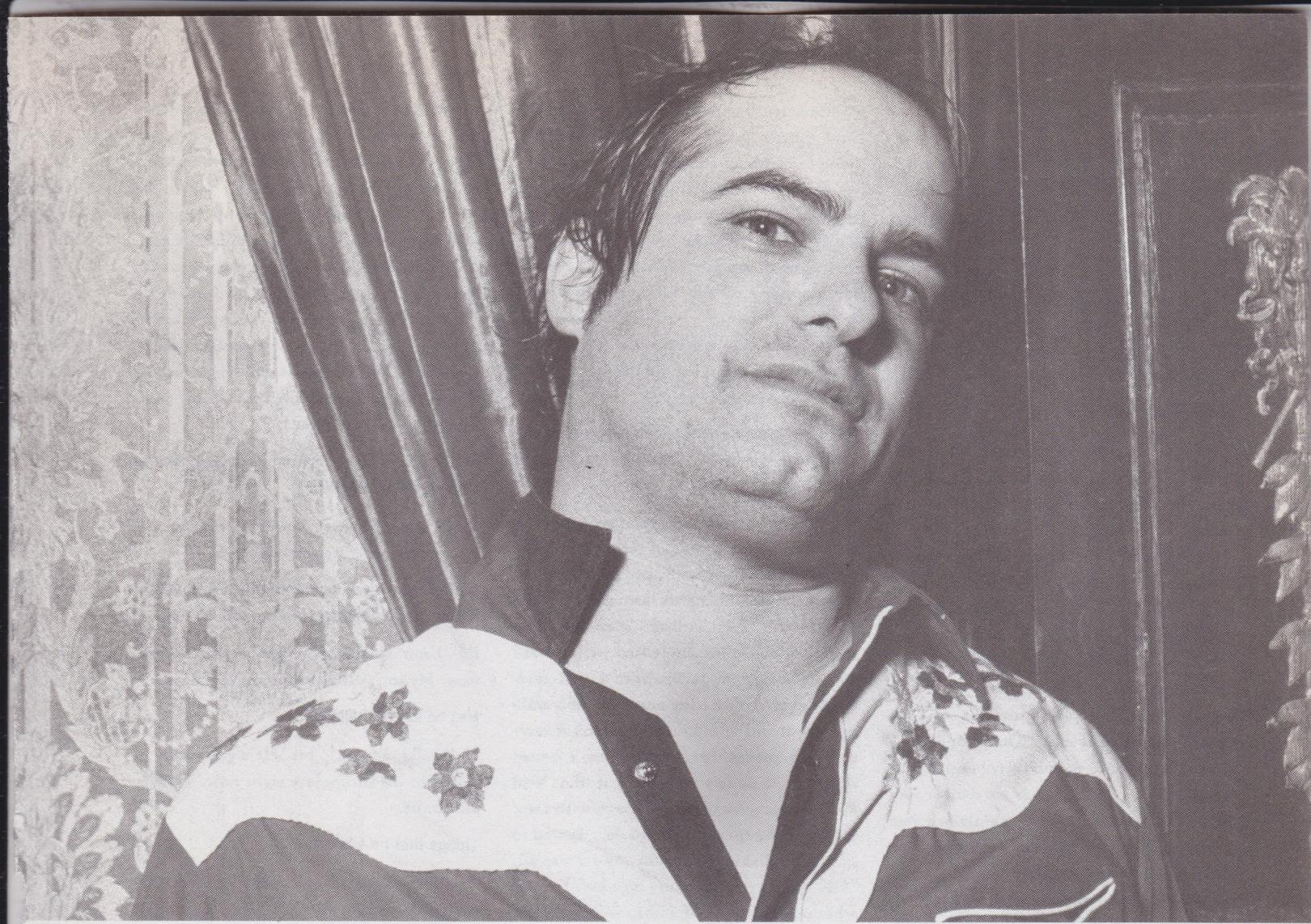
I was really surprised to hear that you left Chicago. When you were at the Reader working as a reporter, you wrote stories that seemed anchored in the community. Now you've moved away—actually you've moved twice—you spend a good chunk of time touring, and your writing seems to have changed dramatically. Do you think this has to do with the fact that you've uprooted yourself literally, so now you're uprooted creatively?

I can't overstate this: It was *really* hard for me to leave Chicago because I spent all of my 20s here. Not just living and working here, but deeply, *emotionally* attached to the city, to the neighborhoods, and to the people who lived here. I wasn't a hipster in my 20s at all. I just hung out at this one coffee house in Rogers Park most of the time—I even ended up writing these three long stories about the owner. I spent a lot of my time just riding the el and walking the neighborhoods. Back then as Chicago was being gentrified, these neighborhoods were changing so fast. ¶ There was this guy in Pilsen that I wanted to write a story about. He lived in the apartment on 18th Street above this coffee shop—I bet it's still there: Jumping Bean . . .

It's got those big windows?

Yeah. Pilsen has gotten a lot more gentri-





fied, but at the time it was still contentious and it wasn't certain how things were going to end up. Pilsen represented, to a certain kind of person, the last bastion of the *real* Chicago; it was the last real Chicago neighborhood, in all its glory, without any yuppies. And this guy had grown up there and he knew all the characters from there and I wanted to do a story about him as the representative character of Pilsen. So I hung out with him for this profile I wanted to do. We did a lot of interviews and he introduced me to people around the neighborhood. We even went on a road trip with him and an artist buddy of his to New Orleans. And after all that, I wrote a pro-

file of him that was really good. It was maybe the best thing I had written for the *Reader*, but he refused to let me publish it. He basically berated me. He was like, "You come in here to our neighborhood, and you talk about our lives, and you turn our lives into stories, and you don't understand that these are *real* people. They're not characters for you to write about." And then he berated me about some other stories I had written—stories I had thought were really good. He was like, "These people *hated* the stories! They *hated* you! They can't believe you did this to them." All I intended to do by writing the story was talk about real people and real lives, but in retrospect that

included husbands and wives arguing and getting drunk—real personal stuff. The paper would come out and it would be in the coffee shop on the corner, and their private lives would be exposed right in their own neighborhoods and everybody they knew would see it. That really affected me as far as what I wanted to write about. ¶ That all happened a year before I left the *Reader*. I made a conscious decision to stop trying to turn other people's lives into my found art. Plus, the city had changed a lot; it had become a lot more gentrified. The neighborhoods I had been writing about were really changing, *disappearing*. They're totally unrecognizable now. It was emo-

tionally very difficult. I felt like I was breaking up with Chicago. Even when we were driving in the other day, we were going through the s-curve on Lake Shore Drive, it felt like I was coming face-to-face with an ex-girlfriend. But ultimately, I wasn't going to go any farther with the stuff I was doing here. The people I knew when I was living here weren't very supportive of the parody stuff I was doing for *McSweeney's*. I had to let it go.

So then where did you go?

I moved to Philadelphia for about a year and a half. I moved there because I thought Philly was like the ungentrified city, and I wanted to live in an ungentrified city. I soon found out that a little bit of gentrification goes a long way. The week I moved in, an off-duty cop was beaten up on the street corner outside my house, and I saw people walking over the puddles of blood that had soaked into the snow. Twice, I had bags of medical waste dumped on my doorstep. I was just like, "This is bullshit." It was dangerous, it was dirty, and it was mean. Much of Chicago is *not* dangerous, dirty, and mean. There certainly are vast swaths that are, but it was *everywhere* there and it was surly and difficult [laughs]. I tried really hard, but I couldn't make it work. ¶ The years in Philly were also really rough because I had left my job at the *Reader* where I had a steady income, and I was still doing the *McSweeney's* thing which did not pay at all. I got a small paperback book contract for the *Anthology*, but I was really stringing it together. It was really, really touch-and-go for a couple of years. I had to do a lot of corporate writing. I did the copy for Weight Watchers: the Men's Program—I was an employee of fucking *Weight Watchers*. But I was starting to work on the novel, and I knew it was the way I wanted to go. I had an agent—a really bad agent but an agent nonetheless. And then *McSweeney's* kind of dropped me. Dave Eggers just decided to take things in a different direction, a more literary direction, and I was too silly and loud I guess. So I was twisting in the wind for a while there. They were difficult years. ¶ But things have cleared up immensely since then. I moved to Austin, Texas, which is like *paradise*. There's a small literary

community, but there are a *ton* of readers. And there's just a lot of cool people to hang out with. It's a very laid back place. I do miss the things that you just kind of take for granted when you live in a city. Chicago has infinite riches in terms of that kind of stuff: neighborhood restaurants serving ethnic food and just *color*. Austin is either very white or very Mexican, depending on which side you're on, but it's a nice way of life down there and there's a lot of creativity.

OK, so where in all that time did you start creating **Neal Pollack**, the character, the Greatest Living Writer?

Well, I didn't just conceive of that persona all of a sudden. I was just writing all these pieces in the first person and reading them at spoken word nights around Chicago without the "Neal Pollack" name attached to it. They were just these first person parodies of magazine journalism. In the early 1990s magazine writing was incredibly self-indulgent and pompous so I started channeling these pieces—for the lack of a better verb—but I didn't conceive of the Neal Pollack character until I sat down with Dave Eggers in the spring of 2000. He wanted to start a publishing company, and I was all, "OK, I'll be your dancing monkey; I've got a boundless supply of ambition and I'll do anything." We decided to call it the *Neal Pollack Anthology of American Literature* and from there it became this whole big thing. Sometimes I wonder if it was a mistake to use my name because people have confused me with him; people don't think I'm a real person, or they think that I am, but that I'm the guy in the books. I guess it gets in the way sometimes. ¶ It's had this other weird element that I never expected: I never pictured that people would be saying my first and last name together. I hear it and it sounds like a brand of soap or something. But then I guess it worked, and my name started to get out there more; but then like I said, I had that split with *McSweeney's*. I had to leave the nest and I felt like that was yet another breakup. But now I look back and say it was all for the best.

So do you approach everything in your life as if you're sleeping with it?

[laughs] Yeah, I guess I do. It's like I was dat-

ing the *Reader* for seven years and it was like this long relationship that was really good for a while in the beginning and then it fell into complacency, and then the last couple of years were really strange and neurotic and pretty awful, and I started cheating on it with *McSweeney's*. And then the years with *McSweeney's* were real passionate for a little while and then I sort of got dumped, and I didn't even know it. So now professionally, I'm single and HarperCollins is someone I'm just sleeping with for the money, same with all the magazines.

And you're a family man now, so you have to stop screwing around.

Yeah, I guess I have enough going on, so I've started treating work as work.

And of course you got married for real, and of course, your son was born not too long ago.

I've been married for about three years, now. My son will be a year on Halloween.

Has he started talking?

He's talking a little bit. He's got about 15 words in his vocabulary right now. They're all nouns.

Things that he wants?

Well there's that. But actually he loves animals, so he says "bird," "dog," "cat," he knows the cat's name. He says "balloon." He says "dada," "momma"—I guess that's standard. He says "bread" and "banana." [laughs] He great. He's a beautiful kid. Sometimes I see other kids, and I don't want to say anything, but I'm just like, "You call that a kid?" It's been just so great to have him. And I have him and I'm still out there playing the hipster-author and going on tour with my band, and it's like "Wow, you can be a dad and still do all that." And he's becoming this really great mental and emotional anchor. It is this automatic priority that always matters.

And your wife, what does she do?

She's a painter and an art teacher, but she works at home most of the time.

Is that good?

Yeah. It's a challenge sometimes—quarters get a little close. But I spend a lot of time with my boy, like at least a few hours every

day it's just him and me. So I know him really well. I mean this is a person who thinks it's funny when I dance around and sing Spanish Flea, so it doesn't help me be more sophisticated, but it does put me in a better mood, which is good for working. It's great to be around him.

What do you think is funny? What's helped make your humor more sophisticated?

These are really good times for humor. You've got the *Daily Show*, the *Onion*, Conan O'Brien and *The Simpsons*—dear God, *The Simpsons*. I'd say this is the Golden Age of humor. I mean *Strangers with Candy* and *Reno 911*—these shows are *hilarious*. I'm trying to carve out this niche for myself, as like the funny book-guy. I want to create a new form or category or something, because I don't want to get lumped in with "humorists." I don't think most of the "humorists" who write books are particularly funny. Michael Moore is definitely not funny anymore, and his books are *really* unfunny. His movies have some good moments in them, but the books . . . oy! Al Franken is a little funny, but not really, it's more that he's funny-themed. I really don't want to be associated with that writing, so I'm trying to avoid it. I guess I'm sort of at the bottom of that pecking order anyway.

The approach that you take in your satire has a real bite. Like you said before, your writing comes from real frustration, anger, and disappointment that you walk around with, but it's also filled with humor. Does your humor make you laugh?

Yeah, sometimes I write a paragraph and I just crack up. It's a really good process, and I get to lampoon people that drive me nuts. It can be really gratifying. Humor can be tough, but sometimes I'll write something and it really makes me crack up, and that's when I know it's good. That's when I know

I got it just right.

I was surprised when I heard you had a baby. Your writing is so cynical, that it's hard for me to imagine the Teletubbies babbling on in the background while you're writing.

Well yeah, I'm a cynical person. I truly believe that the world is a rotten place, and people will treat you shitty if they have the opportunity, and there are very few people you can actually trust and that institutions are all corrupt. But that doesn't mean I don't love my kid. I'm not actually wound that tight; I know how to relax, I exercise, and I enjoy myself a lot. I channel all the frustration into my writing, so I get to have my temper tantrums, and that helps me let off some of that steam. Besides, I just don't think my real life is a subject for writing. Occasionally, I'll do something like I wrote this one piece for *ReadyMade* magazine about when my wife and I were in a fight with my parents about whether or not to circumcise our kid and everyone who saw it was really surprised. After that people kept saying things like, "Whoa, you actually talked like a real person." And I was like, "Yeah I know, sorry . . . I won't let it happen again." But in general I try to keep my personal life out of it.

So do you feel like there's a lot of material to work with?

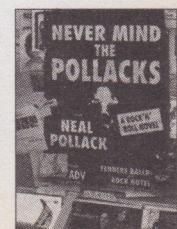
Oh yeah. There is an *endless* supply of literary pretension in the world, so I will never, ever run out of material. I have three books lined up already. I have a baseball book that I'm writing right now—it's a parody of baseball writing and supermarket political thrillers—the ones that have the White House exploding on the cover and big raised letters—I'm calling it *Balls of Summer*. I want to write an angry young man novel ala James Frye and Chuck Palahniuk. And then I really want to write a New York

novel: *The Epic Novel in New York*. There are many long goddamn novels spanning New York starting at the gangs of New York era, and then going to the New York of the 20s, and then New York in the 50s, and on and on and they just keep going like they're following some magical New York pixie. I just don't really get it. I go there now, and I'm like, "This is evil and decadent." It wasn't that way five years ago, but it is now. Now New York is a bunch of evil, decadent, coke-snorting fucks, and I'm like: *this has got to end*. I touch on that in *Never Mind the Pollacks*, that whole horrible, pretentious, holier-than-thou hipster culture, which I really despise, and I don't represent. But somehow I end up getting mistaken for being a part of it, when in reality I'm really just a househusband from Austin. This guy at the reading yesterday was like, "Do you live in Williamsburg? You know it so well." I don't know it well. I think it's a horrible, horrible place filled with horrible, horrible people. I don't know what he was thinking . . . Well that's Chicago for you: the people here are so earnest. I guess that's why for the most part my work didn't get much support here: I'm not a very earnest guy. Chicago takes itself and its identity very seriously. The people here think of it as like the one "real" place, the one "real" city, where "real" people are struggling with "real" problems all the time. That's the "real American city." It's not a very whimsical place.

It's too goddamn cold for whimsical . . .

Definitely. Austin on the other hand is very whimsical. [Switching to a fairy-godmother voice] People can run naked through the streets at anytime of year, loving each other. It's just so full of fun and it's so open. [laughs] That being said, I'll probably end up in New York or LA; it would probably serve me right. ☺

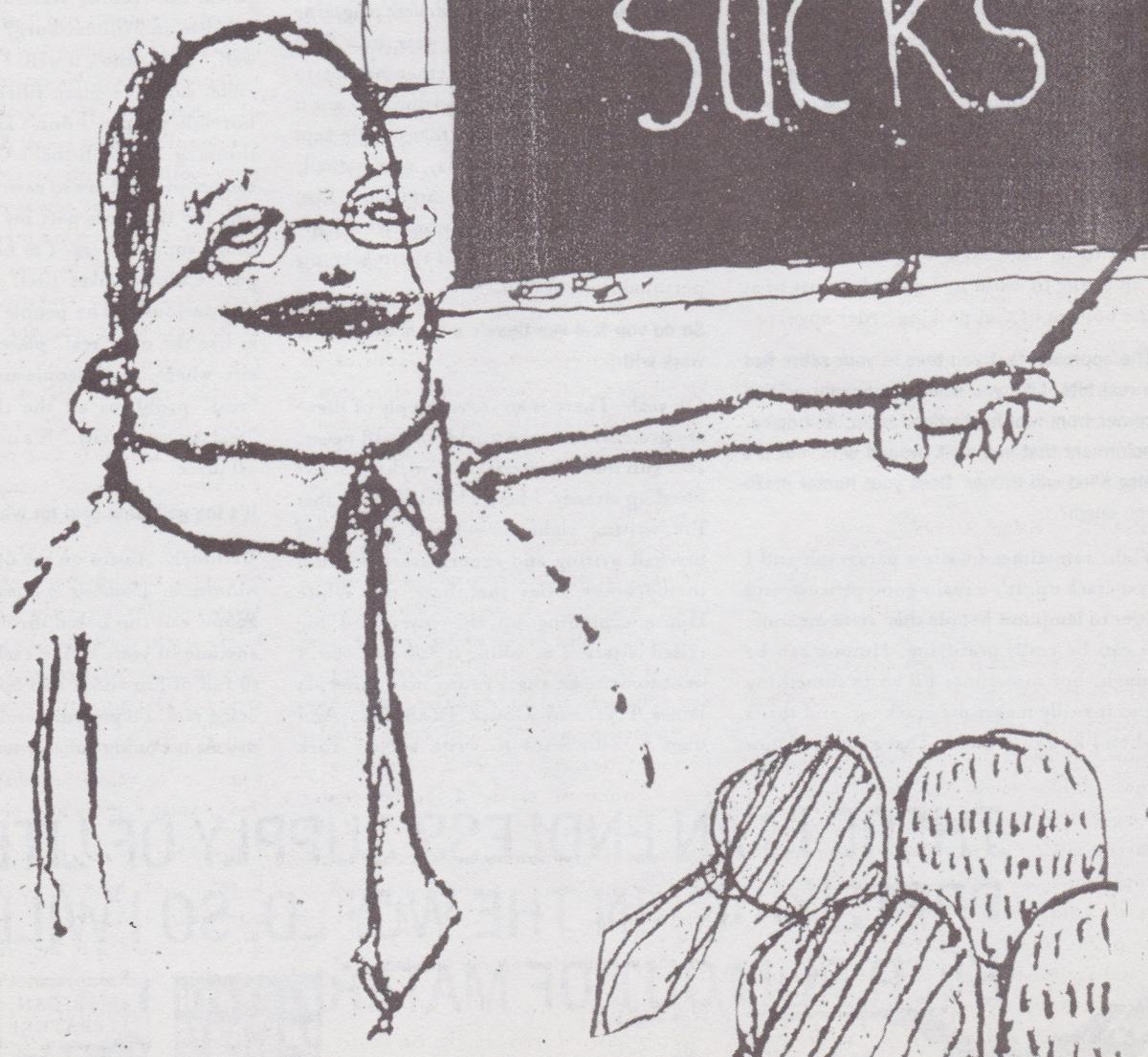
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deschooling

MATT HERN THINKS...

SCHOOL
SUCKS



After teaching in the Canadian public schools of Vancouver for several years, Matt Hern threw up his hand in disgust. He was tired of forcing kids to learn things he knew they'd never need to know, he was tired of the administration, he was tired of school period; so he dropped out. Still, Hern didn't want to abandon his students. Instead, he wanted to build a place that was better for them than what the schools offered. So he got in touch with some of his old students, and together they created the Purple Thistle Center.

The PTC is part community center, part drop-in center, part college. It's a place where teenagers can hang out, do their own work, get support to develop ideas, work with some mentors from their community, get career and educational information, grab a bite to eat, get help finding a job, and use the many free facilities that the PTC offers. Whether they're still in school or they dropped out, the PTC offers kids all the opportunities they can muster.

I talked with Matt Hern inside the Purple Thistle about his two books, *Deschooling our Lives* and *Field Day*, as well as the state of the public school system and what is to be done about it. Matt's message? *Get out of school and get on with your life.*

Interview by **Nathan Maxfield**

Illustration by **Nick Butcher**

How did the Purple Thistle Center come together?

I used to run an alternative school for little kids down the street that merged with a larger public school. After a few years, I wanted to do something different so I sat down with seven of the kids I had been working with for a bunch of years and we started talking about what an institution would look like that wasn't a high school, wasn't a college, and wasn't a typical youth drop-in center, but instead a thing that would fit our lives and our ideals. We just started tossing around ideas and came up with all kinds of things: a café, a drop-in

center, a house. All kinds of stuff that could come together to design a new breed of youth center. We wanted it to be a place where kids could follow their interests without being schooled; where everything would be free and open to a variety of kids in the neighborhood; where people from a wide range of ages could hang out and figure out how to flourish; and where the kids could interact with the community. ¶ Most youth centers are started with the idea to "get kids off the street." Our idea is to get kids back on the street. Most institutions, like schools for example, require their participants to adapt themselves to fit the schools' agenda. We're trying to establish an institution that's flexible enough to answer the question: *What do the participants need in order to thrive?* We interpret that in the broadest way we possibly can. ¶ The center is run by a collective of 12 kids and me. We all have keys and access 24 hours a day. I'm there more or less nine to five four days a week and the kids can open the center any time, day or night. We all share in the ownership and responsibility of running it: keeping it clean, maintaining some semblance of order, making sure all the groups are organized. There are regular day-hours we are open, as well as for scheduled stuff most every afternoon and evening. In practice it's open a lot of the time, seven days a week. There are few rules: no drugs or drinking, no sleeping over, and no assholism (a broad category covering sexism, homophobia, intimidation, racism etc). We also have Monday evening meetings to which everyone is invited when we make all the key center decisions and discuss every aspect of the place, and every month one of the collective members is hired for 50 hours a month to work with me.

So who comes? How do you find the kids?

The kids come from all over. We do no advertising and rely solely on word of

mouth, and still the place is growing much faster than we can handle! The core of the kids come from the neighborhood, but others from all over the Lower Mainland, in part because we are a good and funky place, and in part because there are so few other options. ¶ We have a small space on Commercial Drive in East Vancouver. We try to outfit it with as much good equipment as we can get our hands on and we always have food. We try to make it a comfortable home base for everyone. Then we take participant's interests and build projects, hold classes, and organize workshops according to those interests. We set up kids in groups of common interest, hook them up with community mentors and develop big projects—both in terms of kids gaining skills and also giving the community a push. For instance, in September there were 15 to 20 separate projects happening here; from bike- and video-making, to travel, to exchanges, to writing and art groups, to rooftop gardening, to website design, to theatre and circus—almost anything we can think of! ¶ The thing that has always struck me about school is that people will often describe teenagers as being lazy, that they won't do anything unless you make them. And that's just not my experience with the teenagers around me. They've got so much excitement for the world—so much interest, so much vibrancy—that the trick is not finding something they're interested in but just trying to keep up with them.

In your book, you say, "compulsory schooling needs to be completely dissolved." Do you think society is ready for a step like that?

I think that the idea of forcing people into institutions to learn things that they have no interest in is ludicrous. Not only because it's not a good way to live, but it's also totally ineffective. Right now, after 150 years of compulsory schooling in the US, only 32 percent of fourth graders can read at grade

level. And school doesn't encourage any kind of academic discourse or intellectual rigor in our teenagers at all. Not only is compulsory schooling a bad way to live, it's a lousy way to treat people. Kids are spending their entire lives in institutions where they are patently unhappy. That's just not a good building block for our kids or our culture. ¶ The only regard in which compulsory schooling is working is that it's a cheap way to warehouse a lot of kids. It's a culture of bitterness; a culture of resentment and petty authoritarianism; a culture by which people have a limited kind of experience with self-regulation, self-design, personal responsibility, democracy, and respect. That's how kids are growing up, that's how kids are spending six hours a day, five days a week, 10 months a year, 12 years of their life. Schools are busting at the seams. Politically, economically, and pedagogically; it just can't hold.

But I think when an alternative arrives—say the Purple Thistle Center—a lot of people see it as a pretty foreign concept and are afraid of fucking their kid up and making them less able to function in society . . .

Yeah, that's a really good point. Facing the school system and building alternatives is daunting, but what I've noticed is that parents are often ready to try radical alternatives for the simple reason that people hate to see their children treated badly. Once parents stop accepting that "oh, my kid hates school" is inevitable, things can change—and fast! In the US right now there are 1.5 million home-schoolers, and there were basically none 20 years ago. People are pulling their kids out at an incredible rate—and while a lot of those are wacko Christians [laughs] many are just regular folks.

I think the main reason people keep their kids in school is out of the fear of the future; of what they're going to be doing with their lives. They worry that while the Purple Thistle Center may be fun to go on trips and make bikes and zines and stuff, does it prepare you for getting a career for the rest of your life?

Well, I don't think that going to school is a useful way to prepare either, because it's not a good example of how to live your life! I do think that deschooling prepares you for the "real" world better. Think about it:

THE ONLY REGARD IN WHICH COMPULSORY SCHOOLING IS WORKING IS THAT IT'S A CHEAP WAY TO WAREHOUSE A LOT OF KIDS. IT'S A CULTURE OF BITTERNESS; A CULTURE OF RESENTMENT AND PETTY AUTHORITARIANISM

school will prepare you for a shitty job where you are used to taking orders and used to living in a place you hate. But in terms of the larger world, I think the Purple Thistle Center will in fact prepare youth for a life they want to lead. It's an atmosphere where they can define their dreams and figure out how to make them happen. Good people need to learn how to live self-defining, self-describing, autonomous, and responsible lives in their own communities. I think school does the reverse: it prepares kids for industrial life and for office life, but in terms of preparing kids for a *good* life, I don't think so. In fact, I think this is a big reason why so many youth are patently irresponsible and incapable of taking care of themselves—they've never been given the opportunity to do so! From the very youngest age they've been told how to take orders and to change activities at the sound of a bell and at 18 they are all of a sudden supposed know how to make decisions for themselves? I think you need to start the process about making real decisions with their lives *immediately*.

When I was in high school, there were a few teachers that really stood out and changed my perspective on things. In your book, you don't deny that fact, but you do say that good teachers happen *in spite* of the school system. Are you worried about alienating teachers?

Yeah, quite often teachers get upset at me. But if you look at the drop-out rate of teachers, it's totally phenomenal: 30 percent of teachers drop out every year. Actually, the drop out rates of both kids and teachers are pretty much equal—that shows me that the system sucks for everyone. ¶ The other thing about teaching that is so hard is that they don't have any auton-

omy either. For the most part, they just get curriculum passed down to them. They end up churning out all this stuff they don't really care about to kids that don't care about it either.

But for most people, it just doesn't seem like alternatives are really there. So what are people to do?

Yeah. That's the reality of our lives right? The impulse I have with the center is to try and make it *really* big, but I know that's not right. It's only going to work well because it's small. It's just one project and if we expand it too much—if we try to make it a great big huge project—it just won't work. The reason it works is because it's based on the idea of family. Everybody gets together and figures out what everybody needs in order to get what they want. So what are other people supposed to do? Work hard, find other people, and build their own place. Communities are capable of doing a lot for themselves, with not that much money and very few resources. Take us for example: in a broke-ass community we've been able to do a lot here. ¶ One of the great tragedies of schooling is that people stop trusting themselves. I think it's important just to keep identifying the institutions that are in the way of people developing self-reliant, self-directing, and vibrant lives. I don't want to say that Purple Thistle is something that could be created here, there, and everywhere—it's not. It's one thing we've built here in this neighborhood and it probably won't last forever. But we need to look at our communities, look at ourselves and say, "What do we need? What do I want? What do we want to build?" And people are capable of doing far more than they realize. ☺

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ATMOSPHERE

What do you do when the guy on the other end of the phone stops talking? Do you press pause on your recorder and wait patiently for the interview to re-start? Do you keep the tape rolling, ready for whatever may come next? Do you offer to re-do the interview another day? There's no etiquette manual for this; no easy way to say "I'm sorry that you're at a loss for words because of what happened, but we need to continue on." Instead, you continue on as best you can, trying to keep the conversation focused and trying your best to be both probing and respectful at the same time.

This is what happens behind-the-scenes when you read the words "long pause" in an interview. It's a simple, neat-and-clean, two-word abstraction for a moment when you are really, really lost for what to do next. You will see more than one "long pause" appear in this interview, as Sean Daley—aka Slug—frontman for the Minneapolis hip-hop duo Atmosphere struggles to find words for that which is unspeakable and I struggle to maintain a proper journalistic distance when all I want to do is cry.

Even for those whose love of music is baggage-free and weightless, those who do not acknowledge star-making mythos and believe that artists are not any more gilded and gleaming than you or I—even those people will admit that much of loving music is about believing.

We want to love our favorite bands and MCs and DJs for their ability to hold and contain the Superman dreams we project onto them. They say what needs to be said, saying what we cannot. But what happens when they stop talking?

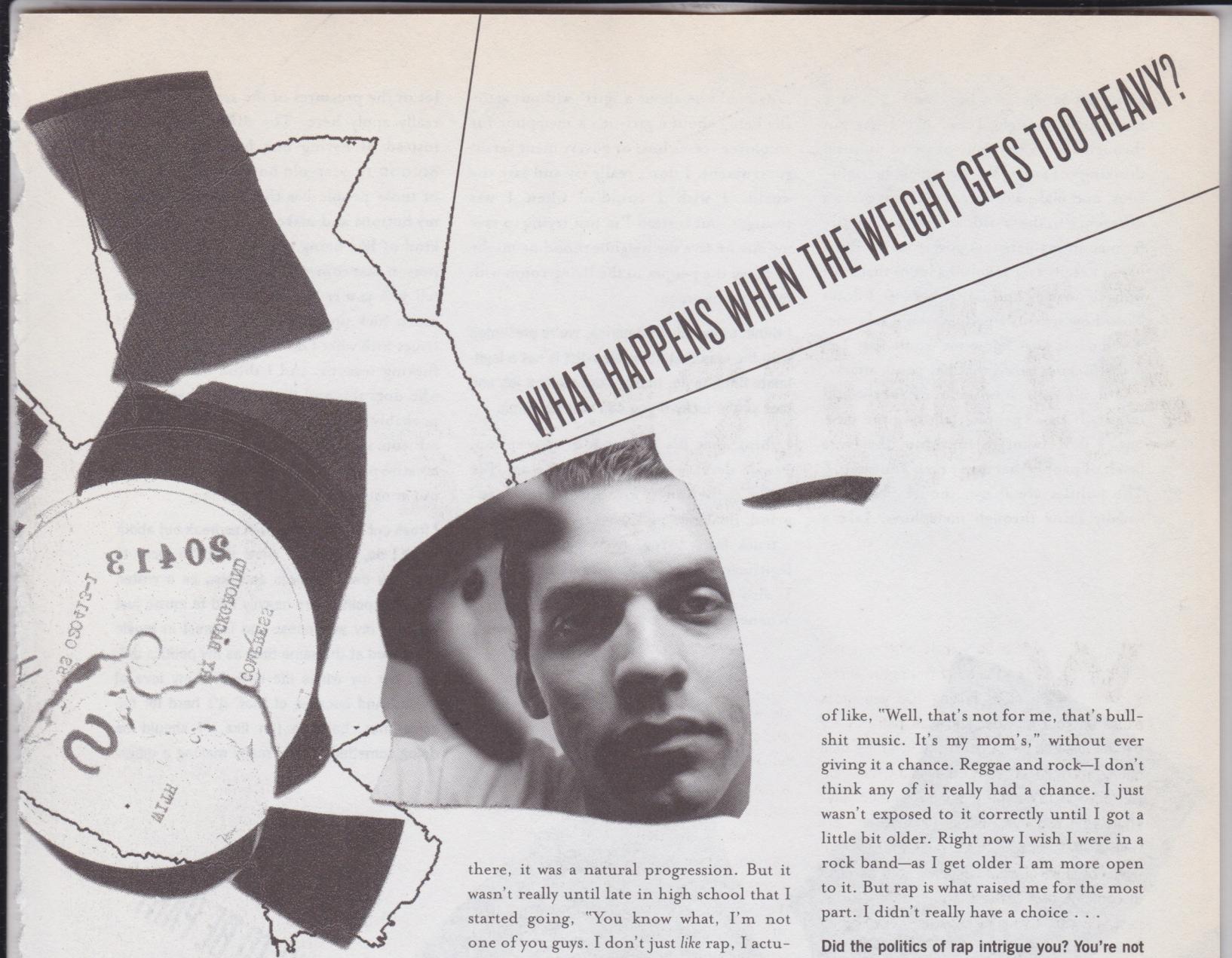
For Sean Daley that moment—the moment of silence, of not knowing how to continue—happened this summer, when a 16-year-old girl was found raped and murdered after an Atmosphere show in Albuquerque. That Daley was powerless to stop it; that he never knew the girl; that the killer would probably have done it no matter who was playing that night—none of that matters now. What matters is that Daley doesn't know where to go from here.

The interview that follows doesn't start out about this devastating moment (in fact, Daley had barely gone on record discussing the event with anyone except for the girl's family); instead it starts out about his development as an artist and about someone whose work means something to 100,000-plus fans. It's about someone who built his fanbase the hard way—kid by kid—and about someone who is reaching the pinnacle of his career with the release of *Seven's Travels*, the band's fourth studio album and the first licensed to major indie Epitaph records. It starts that way, but it ends quite differently, as Daley wonders:

"I'm looking back at some of the music that I've released in the past and wondered what the fuck I was thinking."

Part of the fantasy of believing in music comes from an artist's sense of responsibility, rather than out of his or her ego. As an audience, we expect artists to absorb that petulant weight as their duty to us, their public. But what happens when the weight gets too heavy? When real life threatens to bring the cathedral of fandom crashing down? For Sean Daley, that is the question lurking behind the long pause.

Interview by **Jessica Hopper**



WHAT HAPPENS WHEN THE WEIGHT GETS TOO HEAVY?

How did you start making music? Did you hear something and you were like, "I need to be doing this?"

Not really. I started like a lot of kids my age in the Midwest did. When break-dancing hit major media and started funneling its way into places like Minnesota, I was at the perfect age—I was probably 11. I mean I'm 30 now. It was fun. It was no different than some kid starting with their first skateboard. I didn't really realize that I was biting into something as serious as I was. I was just doing it to be cool and be with the other kids. ¶ When groups like Run DMC started comin' out, that's when I was like, "Whoa, these guys are making music for me, not for my dad, not for my cousin." From

there, it was a natural progression. But it wasn't really until late in high school that I started going, "You know what, I'm not one of you guys. I don't just like rap, I actually *rap* rap." I started trying to get into talent shows and shit like that.

What was it about hip-hop? Why was it hip-hop and not, say, reggae, or punk?

It's probably your circle of friends and the influence you all have on each other. For me it was just hip-hop and R&B.

What was it about the music itself that spoke to you?

I think it was that nothing else had the opportunity to. I didn't really discover music with guitars in it until I was in the 11th grade and started trying to have sex with white girls. That music never really had a chance to try and speak to me. My mom had her music that she would play, but that was *hers*, and so I was already kind

of like, "Well, that's not for me, that's bullshit music. It's my mom's," without ever giving it a chance. Reggae and rock—I don't think any of it really had a chance. I just wasn't exposed to it correctly until I got a little bit older. Right now I wish I were in a rock band—as I get older I am more open to it. But rap is what raised me for the most part. I didn't really have a choice . . .

Did the politics of rap intrigue you? You're not really thought of as a political rapper. How do you feel about making music—of being an entertainer—in the face of war and the Bush administration?

For a while now I've had a lot of fucking issues about what I'm doing for a living. I'm a pretty neurotic artist. At one point I was so neurotic that I wouldn't even admit to being neurotic. Now I've embraced it. I'm freaked out about what I do for a living because I spend so much time on the road. I'm completely out of touch with what's going on in the world and in the sense of "their world." I'm not really grounded with life in general because I'm constantly in transit and I don't really allow myself a lot of the outlets to gather information about what's going in the world—or just what's

going on in my own life, even. ¶ At the same time, though, I feel like I was put through such a rigorous phase of political thinking—of wanting to give a fuck, be righteous, and make a difference. If not make a difference in the world, at least make a difference in my personal government. But I haven't really ever invoked a lot of that stuff with my writing and music because I don't know how seriously people would take me. The people that know me know that I'm just a fucking clown that has panic attacks, so I don't know how seriously they would take it. If those people can't take me seriously, I don't want to introduce that to a batch of people that don't even know me. ¶ The politics are there, though, but they usually shine through metaphors. Like a

song could be about a "girl" without actually being about a girl—it's a metaphor for employee versus boss or government versus government. I don't really try and save the world. I wish I could've when I was younger, but instead I'm just trying to save my city or save my neighborhood or maybe just save the people in the living room with me at the moment.

I think, especially in America, we're presented with the idea that being an artist is not a legitimate thing to do; that it's not really a job and that you're lucky if you can make a living.

I think that it's a matter of perception. People don't see the grind in the art. But I'll be quite honest with you: as much as I grind, this is *nothing* like when I had to drive a truck for a living. Even I downplay the legitimacy of what I do for a living, because I also know that I'm my own boss. Whenever I want out, I can just be out. A

lot of the pressures of the real grind don't really apply here. The difference is that instead of having one boss, I now have 80,000 19-year-old bosses, and every one of those people has the potential to push my buttons and make or break my day. It's kind of like being a waiter. Every random person that comes into where you work can tell you you're a piece of shit and pretty much fuck up your day. ¶ I have a lot of issues with what I do for a living for a lot of fucking reasons, and I think that anybody who does this and doesn't have these issues probably is not being honest. What I would ask you is, with what you're doing—as a creative person in general—are you freaking out constantly?

I freak out in general as well as freak out about what I do, because I know that I'm lucky to have my own business and also be a writer. Also, my politics are heavily tied to music just because my awareness and interest in music developed at the same time as my politics did, but now my whole life is tied to my love of music. And because of that, it's hard for me sometimes, because I'm like, "I should be doing something that's really making a differ-



I FEEL AS IF IN TRYING TO BE PART
OF SOME KIND
OF FUCKING SOLUTION

ence—this is just music; this is just entertainment; this is just writing." But then I get 200 letters in response to a column I wrote about sexism and I realize . . .

. . . that a large number of the people that are reading what you write are still impressionable.

Yeah, or that it's what they needed to hear. It makes me realize that this is what I am supposed to be doing. In that same way, do you feel an extra responsibility to your fan base?

I do now.

Why?

I think it's because I've gotten older, quite honestly. I think that in another five years my songs are gonna be called "Brush Your Teeth" and "Wear Your Seatbelt." I get really weirded out when I start to think about the responsibility, because I start to ask myself, "Am I really privileged enough to think that I can say something that these kids will fuckin' listen to? Who do I think I am?" It goes back and forth.

But at the same time, you're selling a lot of records. You're on this label [Epitaph] that's going to bring you to a wider and younger audience . . .

I've been freaking out for the last couple of weeks. I am now *really* starting to question myself. I feel like I've been very responsible as far as what I write. But for years now I have been attempting to push the boundaries of that responsibility by writing things that *sound* irresponsible but are tongue-in-cheek enough so that people can under-

stand that I'm trying to sprinkle candy on vegetables. But now I am coming face to face with the fact that they *didn't* understand. If anything, they only responded to the negativity without looking at the overall picture. Now, because of some of the events that happened this summer . . . [long pause] ¶ Did you hear about the girl that was killed? I haven't really had the opportunity to reach out the way fully that I need to reach out about that. I've reached out lightly because I feel really scared. [long pause]

What happened?

We played a show in Albuquerque about a month ago. We had a day off during the Warped Tour, so we went and played our own show in Albuquerque at this place called the Sunshine Theater. During our set, a security guard raped and killed a 16-year-old girl named Marisa. [pauses] It's weird because we all really hit a wall, and then we felt guilty for hitting a wall, because we didn't know this girl. Is it even our right to grieve?

It must be incredibly difficult for you. You are doing all this press for your album, and you have to constantly talk about what you're doing and how you feel about your art and your ego, and in the middle of that you have to wrangle with responsibility, sadness, art in the face of mortality.

I'm looking back at some of the music that I've released in the past and wondered what the fuck I was thinking. Here I am now looking at a lot of my stuff going, "Well, did I *really* expect someone to get that? Is a 17-year-old *really* gonna get that?" I feel as if in trying to be part of some kind of fucking solution, I actually inadvertently became part of the problem. Granted, I'm not huge, but I've got something going on. Maybe I could correct the problem, but I'm not really sure what the fuck I'm thinking.

Who do you see your audience as?

I have this strange . . . I have this different

kind of following than rap is supposed to have. I'm being interviewed for *Punk Planet*, which says a lot. There's this sub-sub-subgenre of people like me, Aesop Rock, and Mr. Lif who all have this strange pocket of kids that aren't necessarily the normal hip-hop crowd.

You're kind of caught between worlds. You guys aren't giving people the traditional view of what hip-hop can mean or be, but you also have bigger draws and sales than most "underground heads" that are essentially purists.

I'm really happy to be a part of that. A lot of my peers got a lot of issues—a lot of worry—and I've got mine too, but once again we come to the fact that I *do* feel older. I'm kind of embracing it now. I quit worrying about whether or not I'm "keeping it real." My version of *real*, I guarantee you, is far different from the rest of you fuckers anyway.

What's your version of "real"?

My version of *real* is the people that depend on me, hide from me; and the people I depend on, I don't want to see. I am probably as elusive as I get right now, especially after I got back from this tour. I didn't want to fuck with *anybody*. On this tour, the thing with the girl sparked it and then everybody's life went out of control; everybody is losing grandparents and fathers are having heartattacks, and I got dumped by my girlfriend of six years. I kind of came home to a different house and a new life, and I've been very elusive. ¶ But, at the same time I can't take it. So whenever I can put my face somewhere to get some attention, it's almost like I'm doing that thing where I'm like, "Please touch me, look at me." It didn't just start a month ago. It started for me three years ago. I've kind of become ghetto famous here in Minnesota, but at the same time everybody's like, "We all know who this dude is but why do we still see him walking home drunk from the Red Dragon at 2:30?"

Were you born in Minnesota?

Yes.

Do you think being a Midwesterner impacts that view?

I would say it's more the influence of who I

I ACTUALLY INADVERTANTLY
BECAME PART OF THE PROBLEM.

was raised by, who my mother was, and who the people I bonded with at those very important age stages were. I have a lot of pride about where I live, but that's just because I love my city. I love living here.

That's why you stay in Minnesota?

Yeah. I'll always stay in Minnesota. It doesn't make sense to leave. I wanted to be a rapper, and I thought to myself that I could go to LA or New York and hop in the pool with a whole bunch of little fish, or I could just sit here and be the biggest fish. There's a lot of fish here now, but I can at least do what I can to make sure that if I'm not the biggest fish, I'm buddies with 'em. [laughs] I'm definitely proud of my city in plenty of other ways that shine through in my life. It comes through in the music, too. Everybody's like, "Well, your music's kind of depressing." Well is that because I live in Minnesota? I don't know. Is that because I write a lot in the winter? I don't know. I can't say that. I don't even think my music's depressing. I think it's a poor rendition of what Big Daddy Kane used to do; I think it's my version of what my heroes did.

Where did you get examples of how to be an artist, of what an MC is?

To me, KRS-One is probably the greatest of all time. People still haven't fully realized what it was he brought to the table that made him so special. Not only that, but he made hip-hop change. It was so subtle that when it happened, I'm willing to bet only a handful of people even caught on to it. I've seen some other artists adapt what he does, but most people—even myself, for a long time—don't even realize what he did. The way he raps: he doesn't rap *at* you, he doesn't rap *for* you, but he *speaks* to you. You could hear his voice when you compared it to other artists. It doesn't necessarily mean he made this great style that people wanted to bite—there are plenty of other rappers who can outrap KRS-One—but what he did for me was make it possible for me to make my music very personal both for myself as well as for the person listening. I learned that from him, and that's my saving grace because I think that if I didn't accidentally do it like that, nobody would care what the hell I'm rapping about.

You really think so?

I kind of think so. I think the words are good—they're OK. I'm no Craig Finn [singer for the seminal Minneapolis band Lifter Puller, whose lyrics are referenced twice on the new Atmosphere album]—I hear music in the warmth that comes from him even when he's singing about something that I don't even wanna fucking hear about or that pisses me off or has an effect on me. ¶ That's also the reason I love Tupac: he meant everything he said completely, and he said it directly to me. It wasn't that I agreed with everything Tupac had to say. In fact, I agreed with maybe about 13 percent of what Tupac had to say. It didn't matter. You could take one of those songs that I completely disagreed with and I'll still be like, "Man, this motherfucker is awesome." There was no denying it. ¶ There are plenty of artists that inspired me. Big Daddy Kane taught me how to do tricks with your rhyme patterns. Rakim taught me how to rhyme a paragraph instead of just rhyming sentences. I actually hit my formative time when a lot of really good rap music was being made. You could literally buy every record that came out from 1988 to damn near 1990—for like two years almost every record was good. All these records were starting to go in different directions. It was incredible for anybody that was becoming a rapper at the time. De La Soul taught me how to completely break the form. Chuck D doesn't even fucking rhyme, he just would yell at you. All of these things happening were so incredible that they made an impact on not just me but a whole batch of me's that are now rapping or have been rapping for the last 10 years.

So you started when you were in high school?

Yeah, I started writing my rhymes down in high school.

What were your rhymes about initially?

I wanted to be LL Cool J. This was before LL hit his album-full-of-girl-songs phase. It's funny because friends tell me I have turned into LL Cool J! I even hit my album-full-of-girls songs. As a kid I joked that my real dad was LL Cool J and Prince. That's what I wanted out of music. I wanted to be able to rap like LL but also be able to capture your attention like Prince could. It made me a really cocky, horny teenager being one part LL, one part Prince, and one part my mom.

What happened after that?

I felt that for a 19 or 20 year old, I was pretty on top of things, and I could make a difference. If not as a rapper, then as this little revolutionary that I assumed I was. It wasn't until life hit that I realized that the revolution is at home and the revolution is personal. Until I save myself, I cannot save the people around me, I can't save anybody else. Once I had a kid, I really started to take in what fatherhood meant to me. And that's when the issue began: Here I am now talking to kids that I don't even fucking know, knowing damn well that I need to be at home telling my kid that it's OK to feel sorrow and it's OK to feel pain. ©

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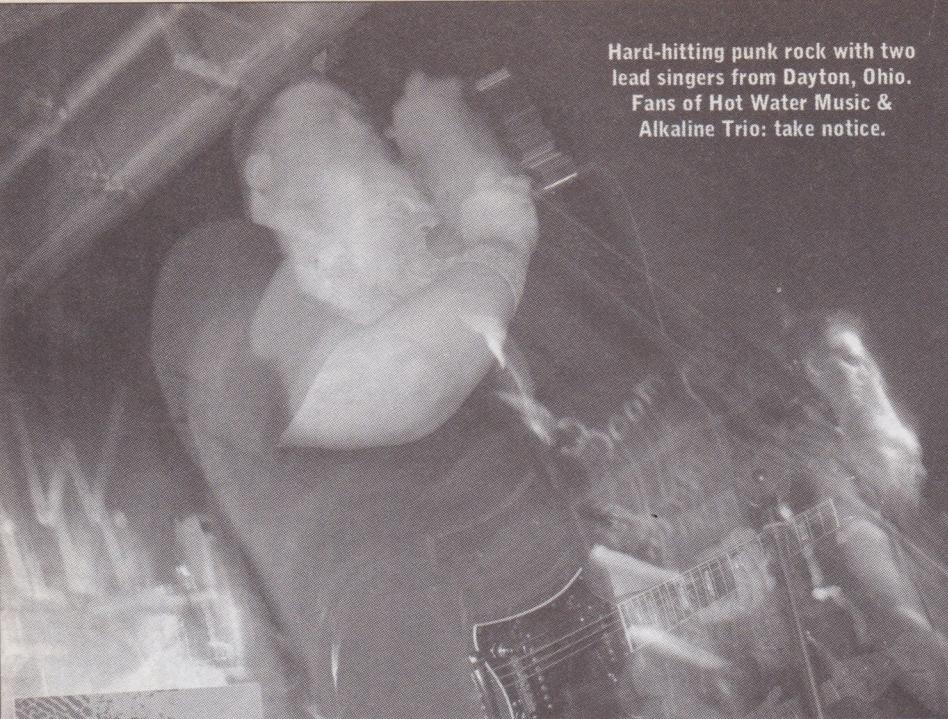
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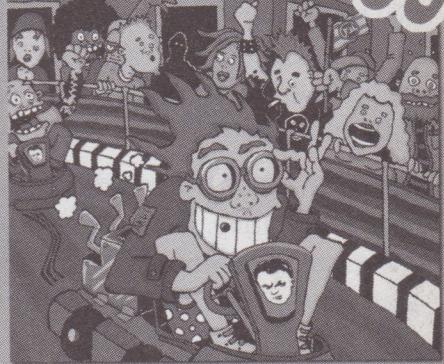
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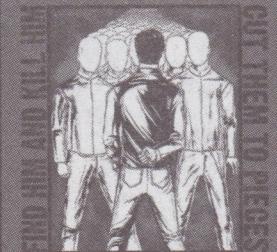
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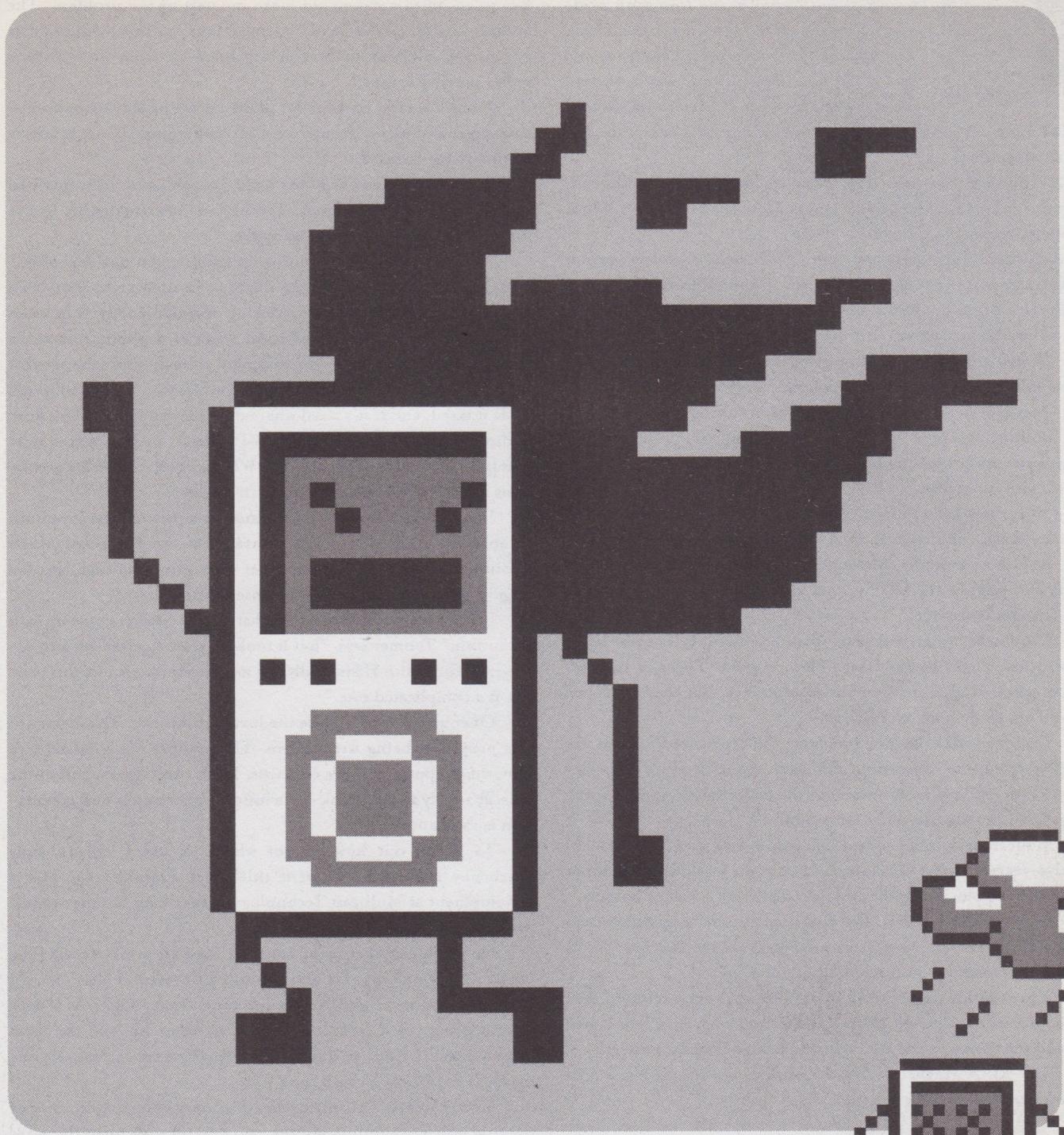
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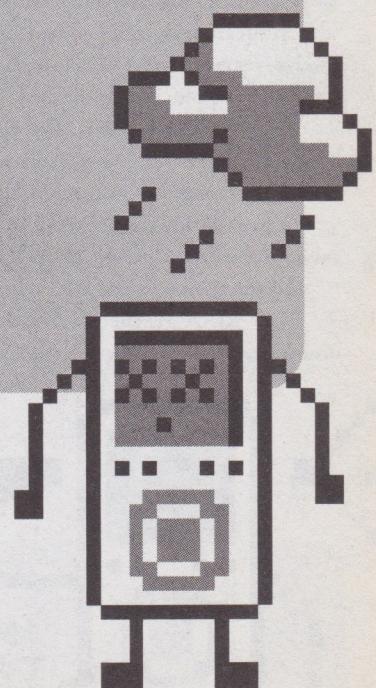
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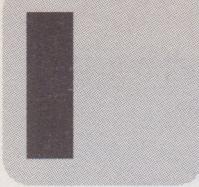
**REVOL
UTION**

**A MORALITY PLAY IN 8 BITS PLAYS OUT AS
THE BATTLE FOR DIGITAL MUSIC DOWN-
LOADING REACHES INDEPENDENT LABELS.**



BY JEFF GUNTZEL ► ILLUSTRATIONS BY EBOY





In September 2002 Bart Blasengame received a package in the mail at the New York headquarters of the swank men's magazine, *Details*. The package was from a record company and seeing as how Blasengame was a record reviewer, he opened it. It was an advance copy of Pearl Jam's *Riot Act*, an album he was anticipating anxiously. But there was more.

"They sent it in this really nice portable CD player with really nice headphones," Blasengame recalls from his Manhattan office, "better than anything I had."

But that's not the strange part. Such small treasures are not completely incongruous in the world of bottomless-budget marketing that often surrounds mega-stars like Pearl Jam.

The strange part was that the CD player was glued shut.

"It was hard-core glue," Blasengame says. "And not only was the CD player itself glued shut, but the headphones were glued into the jack!"

And so it has come to this. Desperately trying to keep up with the unflinching pace of technological progress, billion-dollar companies are protecting their contractual ownership of recorded music with superglue.

"It is these little things," Blasengame says, "that let you know why the music industry is in such trouble."

At home, naturally, Blasengame pried the player open with a knife and popped the CD into his stereo. He managed to get the headphones loose, too.

"And to be honest with you," Blasengame confides a year later, "I still have those headphones. They're great. There is still this gunk piece of glue stuck to the headphones, but they work just fine. They go with me everywhere."

One year after the glue incident—the expensive PR stunt was not repeated—the Recording Industry Association of America (RIAA), the official mouthpiece for the major labels, started suing kids. Let's be fair; they were suing pirates.

Modern day pirates come in all shapes and sizes . . . and ages. Twelve-year-old pirate Brianna LaHara made worldwide headlines when she was plucked by the RIAA in their first batch of lawsuits.

From her New York City Housing Authority apartment on West 84th Street, the terrified young girl told the *New York Post*, "I really got scared. My stomach is all turning."

A peek inside the pre-teen pirate's treasure chest revealed illegal copies of the timeless classic "If You're Happy and You Know It" and the theme to the CBS television show "Family Matters."

The RIAA reached a \$2000 settlement with Brianna just hours after announcing the suit.

Of course, the litany against the major labels and their bad-will ambassador the

RIAA could easily displace the rest of this magazine's content. But to go on this way would make me part of the problem. The endless chatter about "evil" corporations vs. the helpless little guy or gal will keep us forever a gripe away from what matters most: moving forward.

Jenny Toomey, co-founder of the Future of Music Coalition—a musicians' advocacy group based in Washington DC—is interested in moving forward.

A founding member of the band Tsunami and the influential indie label Simple Machines, Toomey was restringing her guitar for a show later that night as we spoke.

"Basically what we're running up against right now is prohibition," Toomey says, referring to Big Music's attempts to shut down what it considers the illegal trafficking of stolen goods. And when the people don't want prohibition there is a public discussion about, you know, *what do we do?* If alcohol is legal, what's the age that you are allowed to drink it? Who determines who is allowed to sell it? Is it taxed, and if it's taxed where does the money go? This kind of discussion has been very beneficial in that it's a platform to raise questions like what is appropriate? What is equitable? What are the goals of our music and technology structures?"

In a society that perceives technology as the endless invention of answers, Toomey and her comrades at the Future of Music Coalition think it is imperative that we continue to highlight the lingering questions. But the response is often slow.

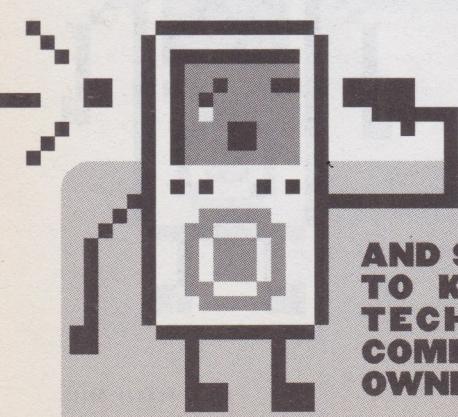
"There is a lot of frustration that people haven't come up with a solution," Toomey says, "but it took 30 years to establish a royalty system for radio. Historically, we must understand that this project is a complicated one."

Of course, we don't have the luxury of history. The history of this project is being written *now*. The authors are a mixed and sometimes opposing cadre of artists, labels, tech-geeks, and music fans. It's early in this book—conclusions are tenuous and speculation is rampant.

To figure out how we got where we are I called Sandy Pearlman. Despite his current title, Vice President for Media Development at Multicast Technologies, Pearlman has the resume you dreamed of in story hall:

He produced what many consider the first punk record, *The Dictators' Go Girl Crazy*. He also produced the second Clash record and was a producer and lyricist for Blue Oyster Cult. As a rock critic writing for *Crawdaddy* magazine, he came up with the term "Heavy Metal." And, as if he needed anything more, was also the manager for Black Sabbath for a stint.

More recently Pearlman helped to start emusic.com, one of the first legitimate online MP3 shops. And oh yeah, then there are the 15 gold and platinum records and the Woodrow Wilson History of Ideas Fellowship. Whatever you make of his storied past, he is uniquely qualified to provide a bit of a history lesson.



AND SO IT HAS COME TO THIS. DESPERATELY TRYING TO KEEP UP WITH THE UNFLINCHING PACE OF TECHNOLOGICAL PROGRESS, BILLION-DOLLAR COMPANIES ARE PROTECTING THEIR CONTRACTUAL OWNERSHIP OF RECORDED MUSIC WITH SUPERGLUE. ▶

» "IT IS THESE LITTLE THINGS," BLASENGAME SAYS, "THAT LET YOU KNOW WHY THE MUSIC INDUSTRY IS IN SUCH TROUBLE."

"The music business has really changed a lot over the last few decades from the way it worked before," Pearlman says. "In the late 1970s the music business became addicted to promotable mega-hits. The summer of 1978—the summer of *Saturday Night Fever*—was really the low point in the history of the music business. It taught these guys a lesson that they should not have learned: You can make an enormous amount of money through a relatively limited series of promotable mega-hits. From around 1964 through 1978 you had all sorts of revolutionary vectors that fed the sales base of the music business—and the culture pool—by creating really interesting music. And that really was what drove the music business from 1964 through 1978."

That fateful date, of course, marks the emergence of punk in the US and UK, a paradigm shift in the industry. Similar shifts followed with Metal in the 1980s and Grunge in the 1990s.

"But at the same time," Pearlman continues, "something else was happening. The music business became addicted to the promotable mega-hit and radio was the key and became less and less interested in these experimental, revolutionary artists' records [that sold] in the hundreds of thousands rather than the millions of units. There were exceptions, of course, such as the Clash in Europe or Nirvana much later in the United States. It was a lot of work to get the more interesting artists off the ground, whereas a promotable mega-hit is kind of a one-stop shopping routine. If you could promote the thing on the radio, then that was the end of your struggle."

And so it was that the music business abandoned art and put its growing girth behind the monster hit. But that wasn't the only change in the industry.

"In that same period of time—the mid '60s to the mid '90s—the music business went through four platform, or format, revolutions. First there was the transition from 78s to LPs in the late 1940s and early 1950s. There was the transition from the LP to various forms of the cassette from the late 1960s through let's say the mid 1980s, at which point cassettes were outselling LPs. Then there was the transition from cassettes and LPs to compact discs from the mid 1980s through the mid 1990s."

After the CD, the industry had another format it wanted to shift to, Perlman says: DVD audio. Wait, you don't have a DVD audio player in your stereo? You've never even heard of DVD audio? Don't worry, it's not your fault.

"The recording industry had invested an enormous amount of money [into DVD audio], but they couldn't agree on a universal standard—they still don't have one," Perlman explains. "So while they argued amongst themselves and could not come to a decisive conclusion on it, something else showed up off the scope: MP3. And the entire business got re-platformed without the music business making a dime out of it. The most recent platform revolution has been a *disaster* for them."

Which kind of explains the lawsuits.

"So has the completely and incompetently managed record industry lost complete control of their asset base?" Pearlman asks rhetorically. "The answer is yes they have."

Which is all well and good, but this isn't *Rolling Stone*. It really should come as no shock to you that the lumbering major label monoliths might not be at the vanguard of this revolution. But indie labels and artists fly a bit nearer to the ground and tend to follow the fans more easily because, by and large, they're fans too. So where have they indies been?

"Steve Jobs brought a little tear to my eye"

The answer may have been evident in June, 2003 at the Apple Computer campus in Cupertino, California, where representatives of 200 independent labels and distributors filled an auditorium to listen to Apple CEO Steve Jobs tell them why they should sign up with his online iTunes Music Store.

Apple had already achieved unexpected success with a catalog of 200,000 songs built from releases of the Big Five major record labels. Now it was time for the service to diversify.

Ruth Schwartz was at that meeting representing the indie distributor Mordam Records (full disclosure: Mordam distributes *Punk Planet*). She may have been the happiest woman in Cupertino that California summer day.

"I had a 'pinch me' feeling through the whole thing," Schwartz says. "[Apple CEO] Steve Jobs brought a little tear to my eye because he was a guy with enough power—not too much power, but enough power—to do what needed to be done and to set clearly for everybody something that the music industry doesn't want to hear—that we didn't have to do market research, there is already market research: People *want* to get digital music files. So if you make it easy and affordable—which is where Steve Jobs has to do some adjusting because iTunes is not entirely affordable—it's exactly what people want."

For Schwartz, this is a moment that will change the industry she has been a part of for over two decades.

"There's no turning back," Schwartz insists. "This is where it's going. You're either with it or against it. And if you're against it you're a loser. That's all there is to it. Anybody who is fighting progress at this point is an idiot."

Schwartz's time-is-now take on the iTunes invitation is not unusual. The day Kill Rock Stars announced their partnership with Apple, their website gloated, "Very soon most of the KRS and [sister label] 5RC catalog will be available this way. If you are already an iTunes addict (like all of us here are) you know how psyched we are to be up there."

Matador Records—home to bands like Cat Power, Guided by Voices, and Pretty Girls Make Graves—was one of the first indie labels to get a sizable chunk of their catalog to iTunes after the June meeting.

"WE STARTED WITH A PERIOD OF GREAT OPTIMISM WHERE YOU HAD VERY ARTIST-FRIENDLY AND CREATIVE PROGRAMMER-TYPES WHO WERE WELL FUNDED AND WORKING ON THE NEW MODELS," SAYS THE FUTURE OF MUSIC COALITION'S JENNY TOOMEY. ▶

"We've always been real eager to sell music online because it seems like that is going to be a big part of the future of the business," Pat Armory, the label's general manager, says, "but nobody has been able to make any money. And so we're super excited about iTunes because they are the first people to create a business model which actually seems to generate some revenue."

But not everybody is as "super excited" about iTunes as Armory.

"There are lots of people out there who think that the digital medium is not a good idea and that the buying and selling of digital files is scary," says Ruth Schwartz. "I know a lot of people in the independent world who just think it's not important. But I remember thinking fax machines weren't important and I remember thinking CDs weren't important too. This is the next format."

For those that do not recognize that now, Matador's Pat Armory is clear: "I think they're burying their heads in the sand. It's so clear that digital music is here and here to stay. If people can't figure out a way to make money out of it, then they're going to go out of business."

"What type of craft is it that they're on?"

Of course, not everyone is embracing this change with the go-go enthusiasm of Armory and Schwartz. Enter Dischord Records' Ian MacKaye.

"Everyone told me if I don't go to the meeting with Apple I'm never going to get in there," MacKaye says. Having run Dischord for over 20 years as well as helming the mold-breaking punk bands Minor Threat and Fugazi, MacKaye is savvy at what he does. He's also practical.

"You've got to understand something about me, I don't think about the future and I don't worry about it. All I think about is what will work today. That's the way I've always been. So if in a year from now you call me and there is no Dischord because we didn't get on board, that's all right. That's the way it goes. If you're out because you didn't get on board, then I don't think I want to join all those people who got on board. Why would *anything* be so black and white? What kind of craft is it that they're on?"

"I am not cutting edge," MacKaye continues. "There are two things that are really destructive in business models. One is cutting edge technology and even more serious is the notion of expansionism. So much of the American business model is based on expansionism; if you're not growing you're dying. I think it's complete, utter bullshit. So I'm not worried about cutting edge and I'm not worried about growing. If this label stays exactly the way it is or if the label shrinks or if the label gets bigger, it's all the same to me."

It might be easy to assume that MacKaye's decision to distance himself and his label from the digital hype betrays a sort of luddite stubbornness. Not true. MacKaye recently joined the ranks of the millions who use the pirate's technology.

"I looked through LimeWire, and I found this thing that says 'Hendrix Playing Amazing Grace,' and I thought, *that can't be*. I'm kind of a Hendrix aficionado—I have so many Hendrix bootlegs and I've never seen that. So I downloaded it."

The file, it turned out, was a fake. But it hasn't deterred MacKaye from being enthusiastic about the possibilities.

"When I first heard about Napster, I thought it was incredible," he says. "Finally you can go listen to any kind of music and check stuff out. I worked at a record store for five years and the thing I loved about that job most of all—I was making peanuts—was I sat there all day and just listened to records. Like, 'huh, here's a band called 'Cactus,' I'll check it out.' Most of it was not to my taste but I was still interested in trying to figure out where they were coming from."

In that same fashion, MacKaye thinks the new technology can help spur someone's curiosity. "Do I want people to look up Minor Threat or hear about Minor Threat and go listen to it?" MacKaye asks. "Of course."

So then is Dischord hard at work preparing its 23 years of releases for free digital distribution or a cheap per-song download?

"No," says MacKaye.

"But," he continues, "I think eventually we'll make it available on our own site. How hard can it be? If there is anything good about the Internet—and there are some things good about it—it kind of cuts out the middleman. It's just a matter of being able to be found."

"You should never sign your rights away"

"People have all different kinds of takes on this," Kevin Arnold, the creator of San Francisco's Noise Pop Festival and, more recently, a co-founder of the Independent Online Distribution Alliance (IODA)—a broker between online music stores and independent record labels—says. "For some people it's a no-brainer. Others are not really sure. Those degrees," Arnold says, "even though they may seem very, very far apart, are closely related in the real world."

For Arnold, MacKaye's skepticism is rooted in reality.

"People have seen a lot of companies come and go in the digital music world over the last five years," he says. "I think in many cases they are reasonably skeptical and sort of cautious about this stuff."

Indeed, a quick glimpse at the arc of online digital music over the past few years suggests that the eager and the cautious may both be right.

"When we first got into this discussion," explains Future of Music's Jenny Toomey, "it was the 'Dot-Com Revolution' period and there was a lot of money being put up for online music because everybody knew that music was going to be the testing ground for these new entertainment pipelines. So there was an enormous amount of money for startups—people like Emusic, Garageband.com, Listen.com, and the Internet Underground

Music Archive (IUMA)—a lot of those folks had great ideas and came to do music not just because it was a good first step but also because they were music fans."

Coming from the point of view of a fan, while admirable, ultimately brought a swift end to many of these ventures.

"During that period there was a lot of excitement and idealism about how to build and take the next steps. But there was also a lot of arrogance in the sense that nobody from the technology companies thought they needed to talk to either legislators or lawyers. As a result they didn't know what the major labels knew, which was that making copies of copyrighted material that you do not own the license to is pretty clear infringement."

And so the outcome was all but inevitable, Toomey says. "The people who were setting up these nodes to trade these files or who were maintaining the lists of these files were going to be sued for copyright infringement and it was going to hold up in court."

Then, Toomey explains, there would be legal precedence and the funding for online music experiments was going to disappear.

"And that's exactly what happened," she says.

Toomey offers us another brief history lesson that doubles as a kind of eight-bit morality play:

"We started with a period of great optimism where you had very artist-friendly and creative programmer-types who were well funded and working on the new models. They were very altruistic and they understood that the thing that they had to offer was something that would be more equitable for artists and more responsive to the desires of customers both price-wise and use-wise. And then you see many of the companies get sued and quickly become very conservative. A lot of times the people who started these companies then lost their positions running them and new CFOs and CEOs came in to protect the money and the investments. And a lot of the money for next steps dried up."

More and more, companies that were once the vanguard were playing big business games of buying up and selling off. The people at the top were no longer music fans first.

"There was a period of time," Toomey continues, "where within about six months all the 'cool' indie labels had been approached by these new folks and some of them—including Emusic—were offering little advances for exclusive rights to digital downloads for a period of three years or something. And most of these people who were approached were like 'Well, I've never made any money from digital downloads. . . some of these bits of my catalog don't bring in \$300 a year much less \$3000. This is win-win.'"

Ruth Schwartz didn't see any winning at all. Whether it's Emusic or the Patriot Act, she believes, "You should never sign your rights away. As a wholesaler I want to be able to go to retailers and individuals and just say 'Here is your product and you give me the money back.' If there is going to be capitalism in music, in other words if people are going to buy and trade music—then it

should be a model we understand."

"Instead," Schwartz says, "the phone was ringing off the hook and there were a million and one little websites who were all going to be doing MP3s and they all wanted to do licensing deals and they had miles and miles of paperwork and miles and miles of attorneys ready to discuss it with you. And they came up with a lot of convoluted models. With licensing and reproduction rights . . . you can't believe the contracts that were out there."

It wasn't just the convoluted contracts, adds Toomey, but the implication that some of the fine print held.

"The thing that concerned us was what would happen if Emusic continued to consolidate as it had been doing already?" asks Toomey. "They had become the biggest label in the space by amassing other companies. And then they sold themselves to Universal. It was frightening. The big question then was, does this make these contracts null and void, or can Universal use these independent artists' digital downloads as a loss-leader to test drive their new services without asking?"

"Suddenly," Toomey says, "if you are somebody who has worked actively in the independent music community and do not want to be part of the major label system—you've just been put into it without much say."

"They appreciate holding it in their hands"

And it was into that climate that Apple launched the iTunes music store with its simple per-download payment model. Immediately, artists, labels, and distributors who had been disappointed, burned, or just plain unimpressed with online music stores divided into their respective camps.

But there are more tents than two. There are people occupying the space between the true believers and the skeptics. Secretly Canadian's Jonathan Cargill is one of them.

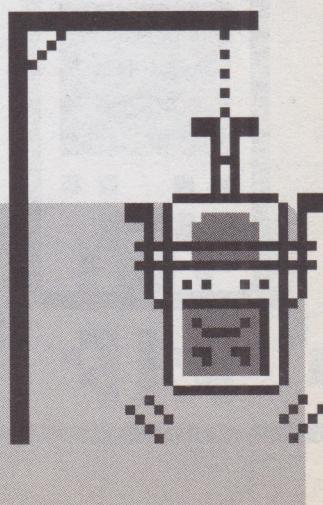
With his back to a 1973 Coke machine in Secretly Canadian's Bloomington, Indiana office, Cargill approached the issue with calm, lacking even a trace of the tension created by the collision of two extremes.

Secretly Canadian—who is approaching its 100th release—wasn't one of the 200 indie labels and distributors invited to "Indie Day" at Apple in June.

Still, Cargill says, "I would definitely check it out. We've had a lot of feedback from our artists and I would say about 30% of them would like us to look into it because it's a pretty fair deal and because Apple is big. But so far we aren't looking at digital as the new way of distributing music. It's there and it's certainly going to be an avenue. And maybe we can reach people that we normally wouldn't."

In fact, it was only about six months ago that the label started making album tracks available on

» "THEN YOU SEE MANY OF THE COMPANIES GET SUED AND QUICKLY BECOME VERY CONSERVATIVE. A LOT OF TIMES THE PEOPLE WHO STARTED THESE COMPANIES THEN LOST THEIR POSITIONS RUNNING THEM . . . AND A LOT OF THE MONEY FOR NEXT STEPS DRIED UP"



their website. The gesture, Cargill says, was not a carefully planned business decision, but an attempt "to be nice" to music lovers visiting the site.

For Cargill, what is most important is that they work with people that love music—and all parts of the package music comes in.

"We want to continue to deal to the people who buy the album because they appreciate the artwork," he says. "They appreciate holding it in their hands."

And with that, Cargill shines a little light on a big question: What does digital music mean for the *object* of music—the physicality of holding a record in your hand?

"I think lots of people still want to touch stuff," says Ruth Schwartz. "But I think more and more people touch stuff and then they go online."

For Schwartz, the move to digital also means less packaging, waste, and, well, rent. "There will come a day when we are no longer shipping around little plastic petroleum products in cardboard boxes," she says. "I don't think I'm going to have a warehouse full of CDs 10 years from now."

"And as the infrastructure improves," Schwartz added, "I think that you'll have a superior product because you'll get everything very cleanly downloaded and then you can do what you want with it."

IODA's Kevin Arnold isn't so sure. "It's worth saying that this is all speculation and there is a huge 'who knows?' factor here," he says, "but do I think that CDs are going to be gone in 10 years? No, absolutely not. I don't even think the majority of music will be digital in 10 years. I think that there will still be a substantial number of CD sales. It's a hard thing to get people to change. It's going to take the aging of a population to really move that far. I think it will probably take like 20-30 years."

Secretly Canadian isn't putting up the 'for rent' sign on its storage space just yet.

"I've seen beta versions of programs where you can download the artwork, you can do this, and you can do that," Jonathan Cargill says, "But you're making the consumer do all the work. That's just stupid. We literally have spent hours choosing the right paper. That's part of the process. That's part of the aesthetics of the release. And I don't want to sacrifice that just so Joe Schmoe can print it out on his Lexmark."

According to Arnold, it is the care a label like Secretly Canadian and its artists give to the artifact that will keep CDs and records and some of the stores that stock them alive.

"When it comes to independents and people who aren't just fans of the hits," Arnold says, "those people have closer relationships with the artists and they typically like or seek out everything that somebody does, as

opposed to just wanting to hear whatever the latest hit might be. And they are much more likely to buy an album or want to hold something or have a physical artifact that represents that relationship. As long as somebody is taking the time to create this package of music that has the art component and all this other stuff I think there will still be a market for it."

"At the same time," Arnold adds, "I think that digital music will grow. I think that it should not be looked at as the way you get your music, but one of many ways that you can get your music."

According to Ruth Schwartz—and many computer geek-types who think about this sort of thing—consumers who want to get their digitally will have more and more online shops to turn to for their fix.

"It only starts with iTunes," insists Schwartz, "because what Apple is trying to do is be a Borders bookstore. They want to have *everything*. And you and I aren't going to shop there—well OK every once in a while, depending on what you're looking for—you're going to find a smaller boutique retailer that is more suited to your likes and dislikes and that is going to turn you on to stuff. This is true of every corner record store. You're going to find the one who is going to discriminate for you and give you the shopping experience that you like."

There might even be an online replacement for—and in some ways an improvement on—the corner store clerk who has listened to *everything* and helps to guide you towards your next discovery, Schwartz believes.

"You'll always have your ways of discovering music—through your friends or the magazines you read and albums that are featured at a record store—but one of the big advantages of digital music for labels and artists is that the digital services, by linking artists together with other artists and styles, can sort of micro-categorize that a lot more. You can go to one band and see 10 bands that are similar that you might want to check out. There is a higher chance of you discovering something while casually browsing."

"You can't stop people from stealing"

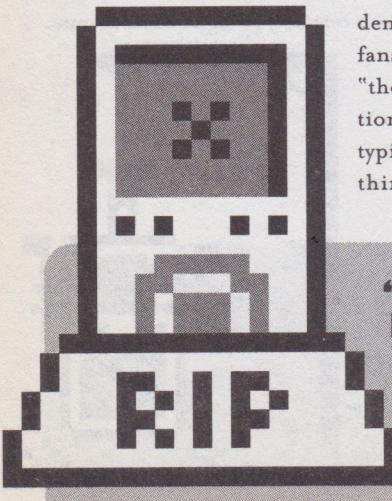
And so the question of independent structures comes up. Apple's iTunes is, for all that it has been embraced by the independent world, a marketing tool for Apple hardware.

"What Apple has done," says Sandy Pearlman, "is to create a mechanism that increases demand for the hardware that he sells—namely the iPod."

Apple Senior Vice President Phil Schiller said as much in an interview with News.com shortly after iTunes for Windows was released. "The iPod makes money," Schiller remarked. "The iTunes Music Store doesn't."

So what about music for music's sake? Suddenly Ian MacKaye's rejection of the "sink or swim" buzz that surrounded the recent Apple-indie union seems consistent with an ethic that has defined and invigorated labels like Dischord for more than two decades.

"THERE IS A LOT OF WORRY IN THE BUSINESS THAT DISTRIBUTORS AND EVEN LABELS ARE ON THEIR WAY OUT," MORDAM RECORDS' RUTH SCHWARTZ SAYS, "I DON'T BELIEVE THAT. THERE ARE ALWAYS OPPORTUNITIES." ▶



»“I THINK THERE IS A LOT OF SPACE THERE FOR INDEPENDENT LABELS AND DISTRIBUTORS TO GET THEIR THINGS IN ORDER AND BE ONLINE. JUST BE THERE. BE DOING IT.”

Of the major labels and their corporate infrastructure, MacKaye insists, “I don’t have anything to do with them. I don’t operate against them. I don’t operate to bring them down. I’m not interested in their industry. To me they are the NFL, they are NASCAR, and they are the fast food chains. They have their business and we have our label. We’re in two different worlds. Of course, they sell a similar kind of product, meaning music on records or CDs, and on occasion we suffer from interference. But I feel like I have a small family restaurant and there are like a hundred Cheesecake Factories all around me. I’m on a parallel track.”

For many, the cyberspace equivalent of Ian MacKaye’s “parallel track” is peer-to-peer file sharing. But not all of the music world’s small family restaurants agree about what to do about file sharing (or, in geek-speak, P2P). Still, in sharp contrast to the major labels, the worst reaction I found among independents to peer-to-peer trading of music was “annoyed.”

It was Jonathan Cargill who was annoyed. On several occasions he has spotted a Secretly Canadian release on one of the peer-to-peer networks a few weeks before the official release date. But he didn’t break out the super-glue, and if he could meet the pirate the punishment would be fairly benign.

“I’d probably talk to him like a father and tell him how disappointed I was,” he says, laughing. “Or,” he says in a moment of Sally Struthers-inspired brilliance, “maybe I’d show him a picture of the artist he was depriving.”

“I can’t be shitty,” Cargill confesses, taking a more serious tone, “because I’ve downloaded songs before. If I hear that a band I like has something new I’ll just get online just to see if there is anything to check out. But I do that knowing full well I am going to buy the album. That’s just the kind of consumer I am.”

Ian MacKaye is completely unfazed. “I have to tell you that on the artistic side and even on the business side I don’t give a fuck about it. For me, music is free. I know that our music is getting spread around like that but I also know that people still buy the CDs and the vinyl from us. I still have people working for me. Business is good.”

And for Mordam’s Ruth Schwartz, the entire peer-to-peer experiment is a useful tool for marketing her labels’ bands.

“Five years ago when Napster was going I thought that it was fucking brilliant,” Schwartz says. “There was no better way to promote your artist than just put it up on Napster. Just drop a few in there. It worked better than *any* radio program. It worked better than *any* review. We were selling *way* more records. People hear something they like and then they want the product.”

But what about those who don’t go out and buy the product?

“You can’t stop people from stealing,” Schwartz continues. “But if you give people a viable alternative, they’ll choose that. And I’ve felt that for a long time. People don’t want to feel like they’re stealing. But people felt ripped off by the record companies. And

when people feel ripped off, they don’t mind stealing.”

For Sandy Pearlman, it’s personal. A Blue Oyster Cult song, “Astronomy,” which he co-wrote, was covered on Metallica’s *Garage, Inc.* “I figured out what the piracy of that record had cost me,” he says. “It was \$80,000 dollars or something like that if I were actually paid for every unit that had been downloaded. You know, it’s a measurable amount of money. All things being unequal I’d like to make more rather than less, but you’ve got to be realistic and evaluate the landscape and move on.”

Ian MacKaye moved on long ago. “Somewhere along the line there has been this confusion about why people make music,” he says. “There are people who are doing it to make money. I am not one of those people. Thirty years from now, I’d rather have people hear my music than to receive 10 dollars or whatever. I love the idea of music being conveyed by any means.”

But what about the “blow to the industry” argument?

“I have to admit,” says Schwartz, “it is hurting the industry. But it is hurting the industry because the industry isn’t even trying to keep up. The industry is not working with the flow of the people.”

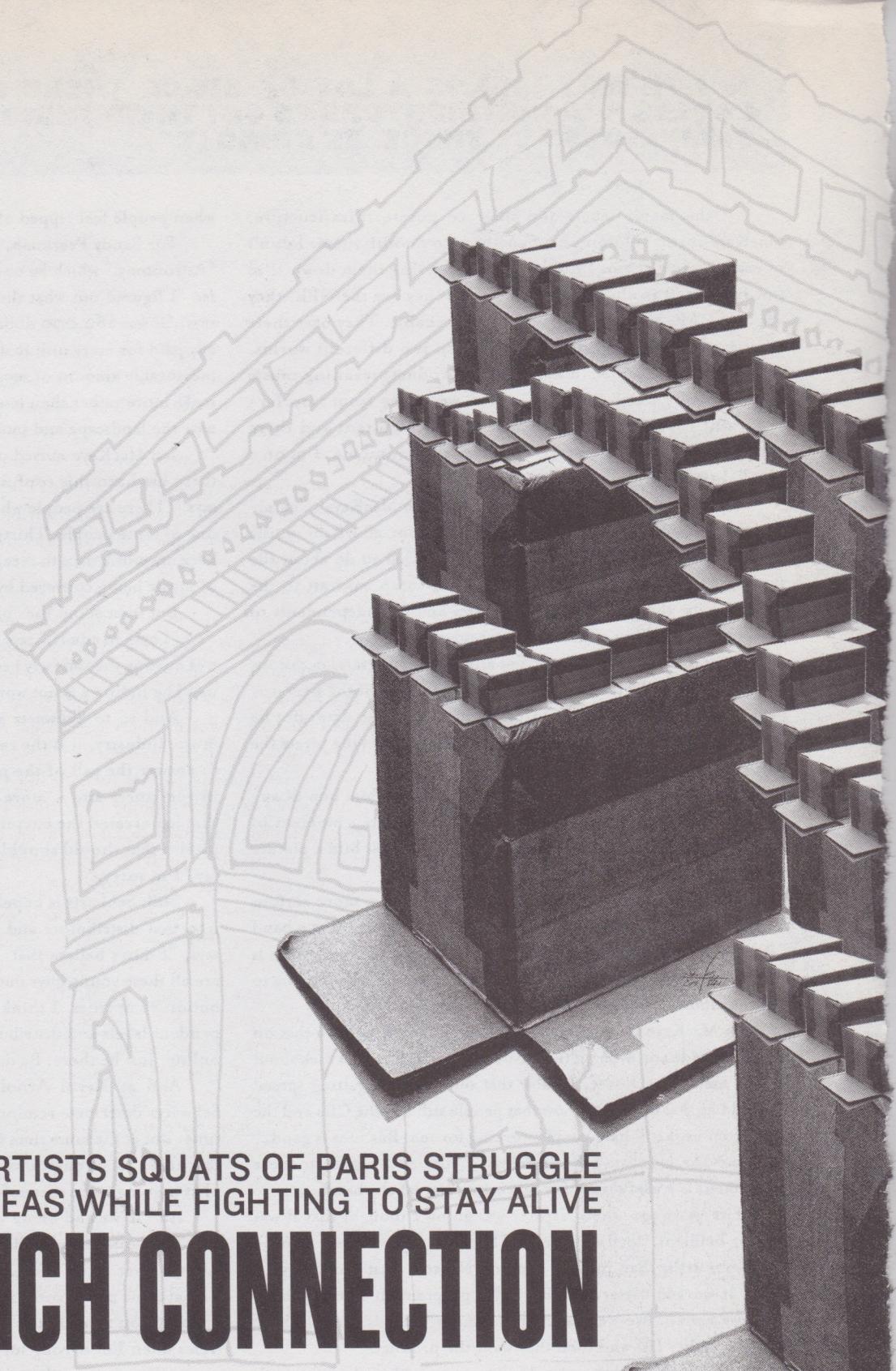
And so to Schwartz and many other critics of the bloated music industry, it is the refusal of the major labels and the RIAA to answer the call of the people—for a more affordable product in the stores and a more viable and equitable option online—that has created the current impasse. It is big business, not little pirates that should shoulder the blame. But big business doesn’t say “I’m sorry.”

Still, Schwartz is hopeful. “There is a lot of worry in the business that distributors and even labels are on their way out,” she says, “I don’t believe that. There are always opportunities. There are all these young guys out there now trying to start digital distribution companies. I think there is a lot of space there for independent labels and distributors to get their things in order and be online. Just be there. Be doing it.”

And as Kevin Arnold—who is there and doing just what Schwartz describes—reminds us, “It’s sort of a big-hype exciting time. But at the same time it’s still really early and really young and there are a lot of questions about how people are going to do it and what is going to be successful.”

And so we end where we began: with the lingering questions.

“You can’t stop music,” MacKaye concludes. “Music is water. It’s in a river and it’s free. Anybody can go to that river and drink. And at some point, somebody came up with the idea of bottling the water. I don’t think it is an evil idea. It makes sense. There are times when I’m driving my car and I’m thirsty and I want a sip of water. I’m not near the river so I have this bottled water. I appreciate the fact that water and music have been put in a conveyable format. Now the people who are bottling the water are trying to block access to the river. If they go down for it, good riddance—the river is open again and everyone can go!” ☺

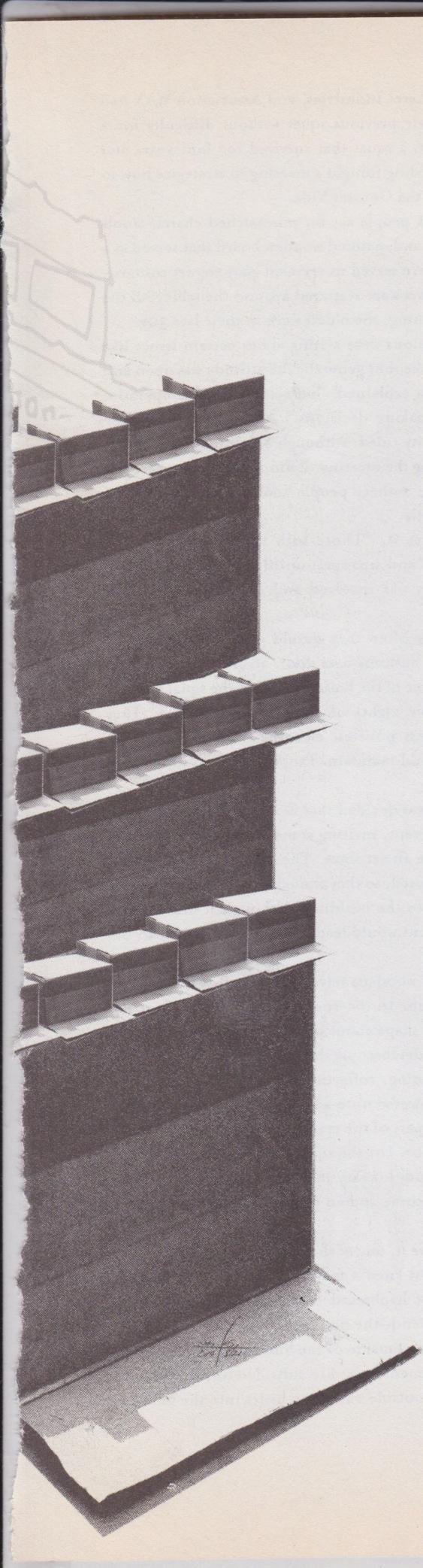


THE ARTISTS SQUATS OF PARIS STRUGGLE
TO CREATE NEW IDEAS WHILE FIGHTING TO STAY ALIVE

THE FRENCH CONNECTION

BY ONNA SOLOMON

ILLUSTRATIONS BY FOUNDATION VISUAL STRUCTURES



It is nine in the evening, June 2003. Lamplight filters through the metallic silver curtains hanging in the large windows, obscuring the view of the Parisian neighborhood below. A dozen people circle the large kitchen table piled with food. There are seven nationalities represented, the people as eclectic as the food: bread and cheese, spring rolls, pasta, couscous. It's a typical dinner at the Gousset Vide, an artist squat that began in February 2003, except that there is an underlying solemnity to the usually rambunctious dinner conversation. The squatters have found out that they are being evicted, probably within the month.

There are around 20 squats in Paris, all of which are constantly on the verge of being shut down. The Gousset Vide—*The Empty Pocket*—is one of them. Situated on rue Vide-Gousset (*Pickpocket Street*) in a posh area in the center of Paris, the 18th century building is a beautiful, crumbling structure with wood paneled ballrooms.

"The building itself has a warm and giving energy," explains Clara, an actor and member of the squat. "For me there is a mutual respect between the artists that live and work there and the rooms themselves."

Every room of the squat's four floors is filled by artists: writers, dancers, actors, and visual artists working with everything from video to paper mache. A half-finished eight-foot-tall puppet hangs in a room that leads out on to the terrace, where a jazz band rehearses while someone digitally records the session from a window above. There are painters' studios, rehearsal spaces, offices and living quarters. Twenty-some people use the squat as their workspace, while a fluctuating number of four to seven people live there.

Michael, an artist from New Zealand, scouted out the building for the Gousset Vide when the last squat he lived in, Theatre 347, was shut down. The continual cycle of artist squats in Paris is like a story that is constantly revised. Individual artists and organizations find abandoned buildings to use for studio space or housing, and then inevitably they must leave, forced to begin the story over again with a new setting but the same conflicts and tensions. It may be years before they must evacuate, but often within a few months or less they must rewrite the script.

Paris is an expensive place to rent space, and supports its artistic community less and less, but it is also a city with laws that strongly protect occupants' rights—even those who occupy illegally. For example, there is a law that forbids eviction of any occupant from any building during the winter months of November through March. With these juxtaposed elements, the squatting culture in Paris is an essential part of the contemporary art scene there, as well as a diverse and active web of alternative living. It's also a source of near-constant struggle—people spoke in hushed awe about a recent altercation that resulted in squatters forming a human barricade to block the police from entering their building on rue Chateau Dunn.

I met some of the Chateau Dunn squatters while I was living in the legendary Shakespeare & Company bookstore. They were a part of an English-speaking organization called the Kilometer Zero Project (KMZ). They were a creative group of young people who seemed to live and work with a drive to innovate. When they moved their offices to the newly-squatted Gousset Vide, Katerina, a British-born, American-raised painter and a member of KMZ, invited me to one of the first meetings.

I showed up at the squat not knowing what to expect. I was surprised when I walked up the two flights of stairs and into the living room and kitchen area to find a funky—but homey—atmosphere with children's paintings on the wall (Boris—at age three—is a member of the collective, along with his mom), a message board, and curtains. Colored lights were strung across the skylight over the round table, hand-built shelves and counters lined the kitchen, the little cups hung from nails on the wall; everything there was either made or scavenged by the people at the squat. After seeing the chaos of the Chateau Dunn squat, this place felt peaceful and cozy.

"There was no community at Chateau Dunn," explained squat-member Quinn. The Gousset Vide, in contrast was "loved by those that lived there, and there was equality in feelings of ownership and responsibility," he explains.

Walking through the squat, eyes wide, I asked about the history of the place, who the collectives were that occupied the building, and what the plans were for the squat. As I drilled people for answers, a tall thin man with long dreads and huge dark eyes came up and asked me who I was and why I wanted all this information. His name was Nam, and despite his brutish introduction, we eventually became good friends.

"Il faut être très discret," he said, sternly. The squat was still a secret and they didn't want anyone to report about it. The owner of the building didn't know that they were there and they were trying to keep it that way. I assured him of my respect for the situation and explained that I was a friendly observer who wanted to learn more about the way all of this worked and hoped he wouldn't mind if I attended the meeting to learn more about it.

The secrecy that Nam spoke of veiled the squat since they first moved in. "We could only enter and leave under cover of darkness, so a day of work was a full day isolated in the building," Quinn told me.

Locked in, the squatters transformed the building. "First we secured the building, locking doors and windows, to keep possible thugs out," says Quinn. "Then installed beds and desks and things that make it look like people live there. I helped build the kitchen, put in electricity and phone line, install the hot water heater, and a door buzzer."

When I first arrived at Gousset Vide, the building was always locked with only one time a day when they let people in and out during business hours, so that the neighboring shops wouldn't report suspicious activities. Otherwise people had to come and go before eight in the morning or after nine at night.

The four collectives that shared the squat were all familiar with the legal and political tactics necessary for a squat to safely continue and none, at this delicate stage, were willing to take chances.

Collective 347, Street Level Industries, and Association WAX had managed to occupy their previous squat without difficulty for a year. KMZ had been in a squat that survived for four years and running. They were holding tonight's meeting to strategize how to continue the success of the Gousset Vide.

At the meeting, 21 people sat on mismatched chairs, stools and benches around a hand-painted wooden board that served as a table. Coffee and tea were served in recycled glass yogurt containers and makeshift ashtrays were scattered around the table. All the people were relatively young; the oldest were in their late 30s.

Already, slight tensions were arising about certain issues like cleaning and maintenance, but generally the attitude was open and accepting, and, as Clara explained, "reflected [their] cooperative ways of working and making decisions." All big decisions were voted on and the majority ruled. Although Sarah, a French actor, was the one documenting the meeting, it didn't seem that there was anyone fully in charge; rather, people took turns bringing up issues they wanted to settle.

As Quinn describes it, "Those with the most amount of respect from the group and strongest opinions drove the group forward. But everybody was involved and everybody's opinion was heard."

They discussed how often they should open the front door during the hours of the business next door, afraid that the neighbors would alert the owner of the building before the squat's lawyer finished research on the rights of claiming inhabitance. They defined workspaces, guest policies, cleaning schedules, and the level of secrecy they should maintain. People spoke mostly French but a bit of English too.

At the meeting, it was decided that Gousset Vide would hold their first semi-public event, inviting some friends who were not a part of the squat to see an art show. The event was on a Sunday and all the shops were closed, so they thought that it should be safe to allow more traffic into the building. Although it didn't seem risky at the time, the event would lead to more exposure than the squatters wanted.

In the squat's huge, wood-paneled ballroom that evening, an art installation was set up. In the room, a white cloth sheet was stretched in a cylindrical shape about seven feet high and 10 feet in diameter with colorful kaleidoscopic shapes projected onto it from within. Later in the evening, collective member Michael showed some of his video art projected onto a large wall in a room where a big metal pole held up a part of the cracking ceiling. The guests sat or lay on the parquet floor. For the squatters at Gousset Vide, the evening seemed like a good, low-key start to something amazing—a catalyst for art events to come and an introduction to the creative community of Paris.

But as fate would have it, one of the people sitting on the floor watching videos that night knew a friend of the building's owner and, through a series of haphazard conversations—you know, a friend of a friend of a friend—the news got back to her.

The owner showed up outside of the building one morning a few weeks later with four men dressed in suits. No one in the squat was awake, but Clara was outside waiting to be let into the building

and saw the flustered woman trying to get in.

"She looked as though she had leapt out of bed in panic," Clara remembers, "After a lot of pointing at windows, hemming and hawing, and telephone calls, they left."

Soon after, a police officer came to make an initial evaluation of the situation. She was friendly and courteous, and indifferent to the conflict, just gathering information, asking who lived and who worked in the building.

It was clear that battle lines were being drawn, and the Gousset Vide was ready to fight. They called journalists, invited the mayor over for coffee, and got letters of support from artists and respected members of the community. Sarah, a French actor, and Quinn, an American computer programmer, were quick to organize an impressive dossier and press pack complete with descriptions and photographs of the people and projects that depended on the squat for survival.

The Green Party—known to be the party most tolerant of squats—was in office in this district of Paris and a local official came to the squat. She "was very receptive," remembers Michael. She told him that "the mayor had known that we were here and they had been keeping an eye personally on us." When the time came for the Gousset Vide to face the owner of the property in court, she even wrote them a letter of support.

Despite the threat of expulsion, the squat continued through the month of June. There were always people sitting around the kitchen table discussing art or politics or social issues. There was a general tolerance for all opinions as long as they were respectfully expressed.

I asked David, one of the independent members of the collective, what he thought it meant to be an artist. He was adamant in his reply that he was not an artist, but rather an artisan. He creates textured, multicolored walls by layering paint. "There are a lot of people who call themselves 'artists,'" David explained to me in French, "who do not deserve the name."

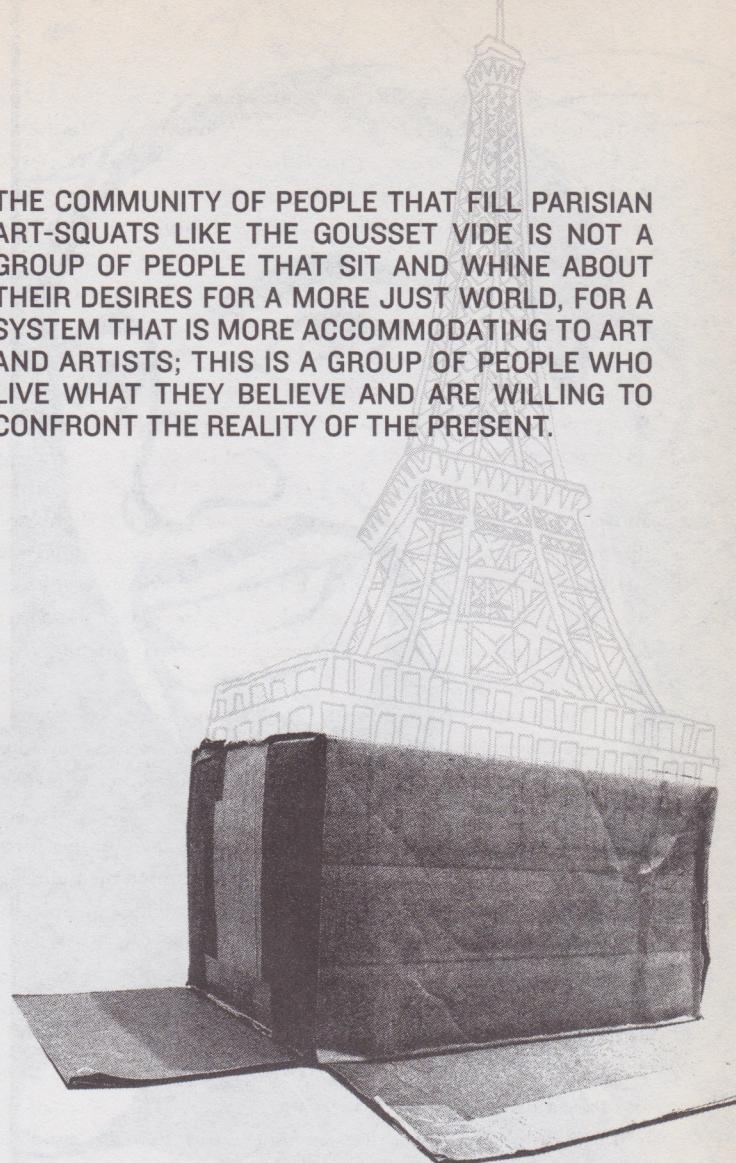
Nam, a video artist of Tunisian descent who was born and raised in Paris, took David's ideas even further. When I asked Nam about art, he answered, half jokingly in his lovely accent, "Art? Art is bullshit."

Not everyone who shared this space was as disillusioned with art, however. Michael takes his art very seriously. He works on sound art, combining noises and music; he paints; he has begun doing theater projects collaboratively. While some of the people were flippant when discussing their projects, Michael became quiet and passionate, his blue eyes brightening. He told me about his projects and thanked me for asking about the actual artistic endeavors in the squat. "It's frustrating," he said. "The frame that we're working in is often more interesting than what we are doing artistically."

It was hard to overlook the "frame" of the Gousset Vide. If artistic creation is a dialogue throughout the ages, then the Gousset Vide is a chorus of voices intertwining so that the whole of their ideas is greater than the sum of its parts. Whether you embraced your art with Michael's earnestness or Nam's cynicism, the Gousset Vide made you want to be creative, made you want to collaborate with others and to act on that human need to invent and explore.

In the end, however, the Gousset Vide shut down. Knowing

THE COMMUNITY OF PEOPLE THAT FILL PARISIAN ART-SQUATS LIKE THE GOUSSET VIDE IS NOT A GROUP OF PEOPLE THAT SIT AND WHINE ABOUT THEIR DESIRES FOR A MORE JUST WORLD, FOR A SYSTEM THAT IS MORE ACCOMMODATING TO ART AND ARTISTS; THIS IS A GROUP OF PEOPLE WHO LIVE WHAT THEY BELIEVE AND ARE WILLING TO CONFRONT THE REALITY OF THE PRESENT.



that the eviction date was approaching, the squatters began to disperse over the summer. Some people started hunting for a new building, some went off to travel, and some stayed in Paris but used the squat less and less. There was a noticeable diffusion of the energy of the place: no new projects being planned, the phone rang less and less. The Gousset Vide had survived for only five months, and is now little more than a memory in a long line of near-forgotten squats.

There will always be more buildings to squat, and more projects to create. The community of people that fill Parisian art-squats like the Gousset Vide is not a group of people that sit and whine about their desires for a more just world, for a system that is more accommodating to art and artists; this is a group of people who live what they believe and are willing to confront the reality of the present. In a city where half of all adults live alone, it is something to find such a community.

People say that art is in a crisis. Everything has been done, there are only cults of personality, etc. That may be true. But I am glad to know that in the artist squats of Paris, there are people who believe otherwise. ☺



Thomas and Gunilla Leavitt have discovered that on the Web, the political can be the prolific

THEIR OWN

You get used to e-mailing Gunilla and Thomas Leavitt before telephoning—you never know when they will have pulled another all-nighter. On the day I stop by, Gunilla is wide awake but Thomas is still recovering from the effects of a 36-hour stint grappling with adapting an instant runoff voting program for sites about the California Gubernatorial recall election and Green party recruiting.

"We basically just went at it for like a day and a half straight, until we'd gotten it finished," explains the groggy Thomas. "I'm like 30 years old and the 72 hour marathons are less achievable" than in the past, he admits. But for the two of them, the late nights, low pay, and hard work pay off to help further the dozens of causes they believe in.

The Leavitts talk like a combination of geeks and policy wonks, but they're actually a separate breed: Web activists. They're in the vanguard of a new generation of folks who buy a new domain name every time they want to make a statement. Instead of creating a single catch-all site for their political rants, Thomas and Gunilla put up narrowly targeted sites, each with a very simple message. This strategy has garnered them countless web hits and widespread media attention—not to mention a nasty lawsuit seeking \$1.2 million dollars from the Santa Cruz, California couple.

From Entrepreneur to Activist

A couple of years ago, Thomas Leavitt was a poster boy for dot-com capitalism. He sold the web-hosting company he co-founded, Webcom.com, for \$6 million to Verio, which bought up

...and the couple's political activism has been a driving force behind their success. They've created websites for local progressive organizations, such as the Santa Cruz Action Network, Affordable Housing Advocates of Santa Cruz, and the GLBT Action Alliance of Santa Cruz, as well as doing web designs for groups outside their home town (full disclosure: Gunilla also designed a beautiful site for *Other* magazine, which I publish). But it was their propensity for sound-bite sized sites that the Leavitts truly excelled at.

by Charlie Anders illustrations by Ande Rummel

PRIVATE CAUCUS



a number of companies like Leavitt's.

"I'm just another dead dot-commer in Silicon Valley trying to fill out the hours while I search for work," explains Thomas, modestly.

The first hit on Google for "Thomas Leavitt" is InternetManifesto.org, his first home page. It contains scattershot rants against Dr. Laura and corporate attempts to stop programmers from circulating code that could break the copy protection on DVDs. The site was last updated in early 2001.

Thomas says his web activism really started in May 2002, with SavageStupidity.com. Driving home from work, he was listening to one of conservative talk-radio host Michael Savage's patented rants. By the time he got home he'd decided to see who, if anybody, was criticizing Savage online.

"I was shocked to find there was nothing on him," except for one poorly designed site, Thomas remembers. "He's claiming to be the fourth or fifth biggest highest rated radio talk show host in the nation and there was no answering voice," he adds.

The Leavitts decided to be that voice by launching SavageStupidity.com. They quickly found their web hits skyrocketing. Over a million people have visited the site in the past year, and the hits go up every month. The site also appears to have contributed to some of Savage's sponsors ditching the radio show, judging by the April 18 e-mail the site received from Tempur-Pedic, Inc., asking to be removed from the site's "boycott" page because the company had stopped sponsoring Savage.

Soon after the success of Savage Sucks, the couple were doing sites for local progressive organizations, such as the Santa Cruz

Action Network, Affordable Housing Advocates of Santa Cruz, and the GLBT Action Alliance of Santa Cruz, as well as doing web designs for groups outside their home town (full disclosure: Gunilla also designed a beautiful site for *Other* magazine, which I publish). But it was their propensity for sound-bite sized sites that the Leavitts truly excelled at.

Jamming The Signal

"You get these ideas now and then. And with Gunilla's ability to quickly turn out a site and my ability to spew verbiage almost at will, it's relatively easy," explains Thomas.

As a result, the Leavitts have launched BuyFrenchNow.com to counter the France-bashing during the Iraq war, iSwitched.org to encourage people to switch to the Green Party, TaxGrab.org to battle irresponsible tax cut ballot initiatives, InNameOnly.org to criticize politicians who are Democrats (and Republicans) "in name only", and UnrepentantNaderVoter.com which is pretty self-explanatory. They're also working on AdvocacyMediaNetworks.com, an umbrella site for their other progressive sites.

"Since we're both not employed at conventional work, we have plenty of time to go tilt at windmills," Thomas says.

Thomas and Gunilla say they put up one new progressive site roughly every other week. All this while keeping the existing sites updated and dealing with the feedback and legal issues their efforts have stirred up.

There have been activist sites since the web began, and plenty of other people put up narrowly targeted sites tackling a single

issue. Thomas cites the people who did the "Stop Doctor Laura" site long before SavageStupidity came along.

"They were pretty successful at making her life miserable," he notes.

But the Leavitts may be the web's most prolific site creators. "I don't know anybody who does it with abandon the way I do," says Gunilla. For her, making a new website—complete with domain name and unique design—is the same as writing a letter or drawing a picture. "It's not this big thing."

"Most people who create these sites do them as a one-off," Thomas adds. "There's one specific thing that pisses them off so royally that they're motivated to go create a website. I'm pissed off about a bunch of things."

Sometimes the goal is to educate, sometimes to infuriate. But one general theme of Thomas and Gunilla's site-making is to bring communities together, to give people resources on a topic and to encourage community.

Ideas for sites come from both Thomas and Gunilla, and then it can take as little as 48 hours for Gunilla to do the design and Thomas

In a complaint under the Uniform Domain Name Dispute-Resolution Policy, TRN claimed SavageStupidity.com was too confusingly similar to Savage's own site at MichaelSavage.com. And in a lawsuit in the US District Court for the Northern District of Illinois, TRN accused the Leavitts of interfering with its business.

The domain name complaint argued that Savage's fans might be too clueless to figure out that SavageStupidity.com was an anti-Savage site, and might take it for his official Web site.

In the lawsuit, TRN claimed that SavageStupidity, as well as unrelated plaintiff sites MichaelSavageSucks.com and TakeBackTheMedia.com, were operating as commercial sites (because they sold merchandise) and rebroadcasting Savage's show. In the case of SavageStupidity.com, the site had a few sound files of Savage's show, none longer than 30 seconds according to Thomas Leavitt's affidavit, and the links to merchandising sites were down by the time the actions were filed. The legal complaint also accused the defendant sites of disrupting TRN's business relationships with advertisers and making "false and malicious statements" about

"The unique thing about the internet is it allows a single person to have a huge impact"

to assemble the text and links. A site can be live by the time its domain name has filtered through the Internet domain name routers.

Once they've got a new site ready for public consumption, Thomas sends off a press release and taps into his network of progressive groups online. His distribution channels in the progressive community include the 40 or 50 progressive e-mail lists he subscribes to. Just posting on a dozen e-mail lists will be enough to start word of mouth propagating online.

But Thomas's PR moves don't just stop at preaching-to-the-choir e-mail lists. He also seems to have a preternatural talent to spot areas where he can actually make the media's one-sidedness work to his advantage.

"The unique thing about the internet is it allows a single person to have a huge impact," says Thomas.

Because of their sites, Thomas has been interviewed for local and syndicated TV news programs and quoted in a number of articles. "You're never going to have the same impact going door to door," he says.

Or the same impact as when the headline reads "Santa Cruz Couple Sued by Michael Savage."

Sued by Savage

Talk Radio Network (TRN), syndicator of the Michael Savage Show, probably thought the Leavitts were too small to fight back when it filed two actions against SavageStupidity.com.

Savage, whose real name is Michael Weiner.

On his show, Savage called the Leavitts and the other defendants "stinking rats who hide in the sewers," according to news accounts. "You think you can go after my income?" he said. "You think you can kill my advertisers? You think I'm Dr. Laura? You think I'm gonna roll over like a [beep]?"

Public Citizen came to the Leavitts' rescue and defended them against the TRN actions. The Leavitts and Public Citizen won the first round in June, when the National Arbitration Forum ruled in their favor in the domain name case. Retired judge Karl V. Fink noted the defendants' arguments that Savage is a common English word and clearly intended to be descriptive of the tone of Weiner's show. In his ruling, Fink followed past precedents which said sites like WalmartCanadaSucks.com or LockheedMartinSucks.com couldn't be considered confusingly similar to the sites of the companies they attacked.

While the domain dispute seems over, the federal lawsuit remains in play. The next steps are discovery and pretrial motions. The Leavitts gave depositions in early October. The domain decision doesn't affect the lawsuit, because TRN chose not to mention domain name issues in its complaint at all, says Public Citizen's Paul Levy. In fact, the federal complaint doesn't accuse the Leavitts of breaking any federal laws. It's only a federal case because the Leavitts are being sued out of state and the amount of money involved is significant.

How much money is at stake is still unclear. The complaint mentions both a half million dollars and over a million. Both figures have been mentioned in news accounts.

"The way you come up with those damages figures is you reach into your ass and pull out what comes out," says Levy. "You could say they used large figures for purposes of intimidation."

Hard Times

While the Leavitts haven't allowed themselves to be intimidated, the suit has been a hardship for the couple. The suit has come at a time when the Leavitts had been broke for a while, and were in danger of defaulting on their mortgage. They'd both been unemployed for a couple of years, and the short stints and freelance gigs here and there don't make ends meet.

"The progressive web sites just don't pay the way those right wing foundations pay," Leavitt says. "The right wing drops like \$250,000 on someone like Dinesh D'Souza or Charles Murray. On the left, you're lucky if you get paid \$12 an hour to be an organizer."

Thomas and Gunilla are losing their 2,600-square-foot



house, which they bought in 1999 after he sold his company. Thomas lost all of his dot-com money in the stock market, and now the IRS and bill collectors are after him. Meanwhile, Gunilla is embroiled in a nasty custody battle over her two daughters with her ex-husband, who has attempted to use her activism and the Savage suit in court to prove she's an unfit parent.

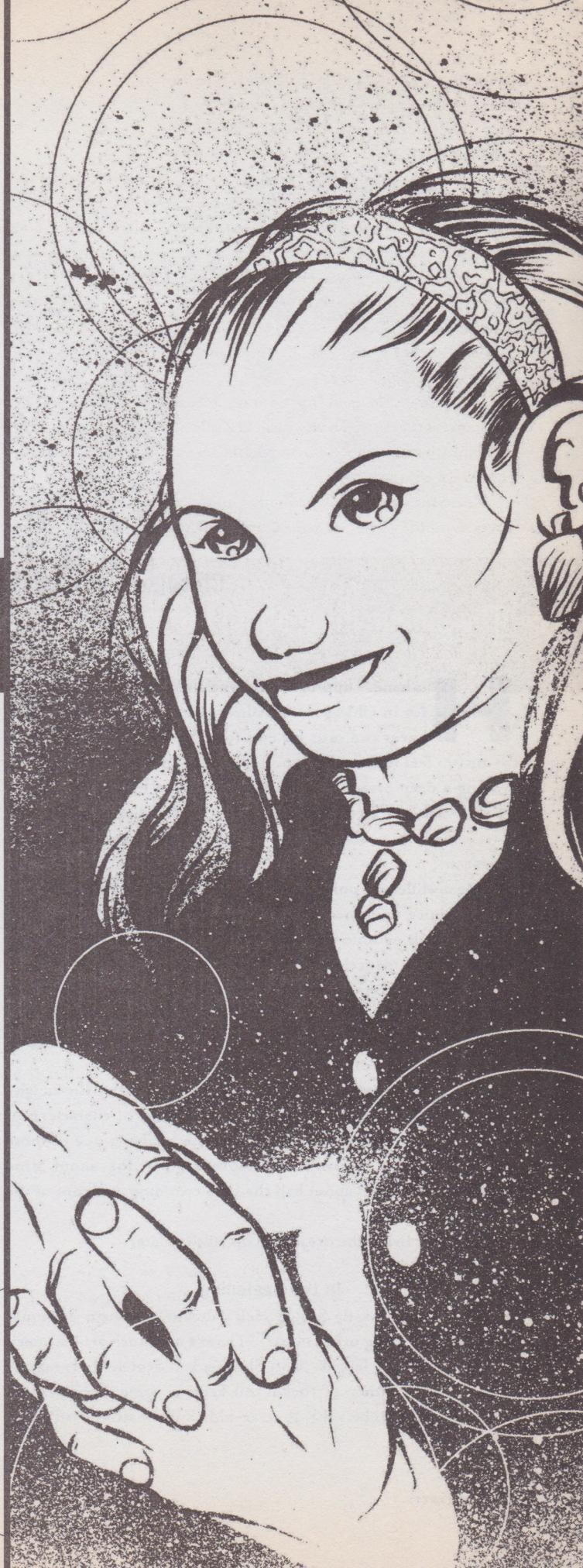
As a result, the Leavitts have to be creative in using whatever tools come to hand. Gunilla owns 10,000 shares in a local ISP. The shares are worthless, but the ISP gives her free co-location for their sites. And the couple uses leftover PCs from a dead dot-com to serve up their content.

Eventually, the Leavitts would like to find a way to make a living doing online activism. Once they finish their umbrella site at AdvocacyMediaNetworks.com, they'll have an easier time showcasing their skills. This may help them find progressive causes that actually have money to spend on the web.

"If Gunilla and I could get paid to actually do what we're doing out of conviction and passion at this point, without terribly compromising our principles and values," that would be ideal, says Thomas.

Until then, however, the two continue to fight the way they know best: by putting up new websites. ☺

Charlie Anders publishes Other, www.othermag.org, a magazine of pop culture and politics for the new outcasts. Her writing has appeared in ZYZZYVA, Salon.com, the Wall Street Journal and the San Francisco Bay Guardian.



RUNNING DOWN A DREAM

Chicago's live band karaoke scene makes stars three minutes at a time.

By Katie Hasty

His hands cupping the microphone like a hot cup of coffee in Chicago's merciless winter, he dips down to his knees and casts his eyes toward pumping fists stabbing the air two feet in front of him. Squinting and raising his own fist, drawing a deep breath between bass notes and his "ay oh whey's", 25-year-old Eric Stralow straddles the air. He then growls out to open cheers in a bratty-but-Iggy voice, "Walk like an Eeegyp-teeeeeaaaan!"

Meanwhile, my purse manages to bathe in some sort of beer-ish floor juice underneath the table as conversation volume escalates to overtly audible over the hoots from the bar. The grinning table next to ours is celebrating a 30th birthday, the bearded dudes in the back are clamoring over a sheet with Cheap Trick lyrics. MC Kevin plucks through a black binder for Pixies song lyrics to dispense to the girl who just signed up while the band takes a short break to shine off some drinks.

The Underground Lounge in Chicago's Wrigleyville neighborhood bears an unusual and entertaining cast of characters on Wednesday and some Saturday nights. Eric has been one of those repeated faces, a rock'n'roll karaoke regular for about nine months, friends with about half the mob crowding the front of the small stage.

"It's just living the dream," Eric tells me later.

In the Beginning...

This wasn't exactly Scotch Hell's dream, although he would love to make a living off of music. "There's not much artistic merit in what we do," he laughs. Scott Shell—a.k.a. Scotch Hell—may be considered the father of rock'n'roll karaoke some day down the line. But for now, he's the 36-year-old, fluffy-haired head organ-

nizer for Chicago's best-known live band karaoke nights. Scotch books gigs for the three main Chicago karaoke bands in clubs throughout the city seven days a week, prints out the lyric sheets for singers and programs for every night the bands perform. Apparently, Chicagoans are *dying* to step up to the mic.

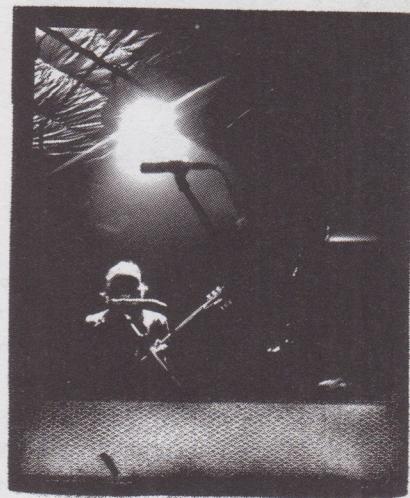
While Wednesdays are reserved for the Underground Lounge, other clubs throughout the city are signing on for Shell's bands. Some special performances have been at all-ages venues like the Fireside Bowl which hosted over 200 under-21 karaoke enthusiasts.

The three bands Scotch books, the Karaoke Dokies, the Hootenanners, and the Coryokes are comprised of musicians Scotch has met through the Chicago music scene by booking shows, playing in bands, and frequenting rock shows. Due to the karaoke nights' success, Scotch has been able to quit his day job. "I'm still just eking by," he laughs, "but I guess I'd rather be poor and have plenty of spare time than just work too much!"

Scotch Hell imported the idea of rock'n'roll karaoke from Arlene's Grocery in New York, which holds what they call Punk and Heavy Metal Karaoke every Monday night.

Scotch visited the club while on a trip to New York. "My friend and I looked at each other—this should be happening in Chicago," Scotch remembers, propping his glasses back up on his youthful face. "The place was packed wall to wall and the singers were *really* getting into it."

After waiting four months for the idea to take off, the crowds on Wednesdays at the Underground Lounge began to demand that they have another chance on the weekend. So the Lounge agreed to give them two Saturdays each month. In January of 2001, Scotch began booking other venues and ensuring that each band would



have different songs and different genres to reach a broader selection of people.

"It doesn't matter how poorly you sing," he says, wrapping his arms around the back of the booth. He looks a little tired, perhaps because he attends four to six of his own events each week. "It doesn't matter who you are. You could go up in a business suit, you could be older . . . it doesn't matter. There's no 'in crowd.' Everyone is equal. Karaoke is a democracy. It's like fronting a rock band and walking back into a crowd of people who *totally* support you for doing it."

The Underground Lounge fills up with around 115 people every Wednesday, due in large part to word-of-mouth publicity and hard-core regulars that continue to bring their friends. Many times, though, strong friendships are forged in the fires of karaoke.

"This community of frontmen and -women, they understand each other," Scotch says.

Living the Dream

When Seth Porges isn't singing and strutting in the karaoke spotlight, he's studying at Northwestern University and casting dreams of one day becoming a professional karaoke singer. Whenever he talks about karaoke, his voice becomes animated and his fingers work the air, and you know that he's got a song stuck in his head he'd like to get out on stage. But before he takes the stage at tonight's karaoke night, he turns to me deadly serious, saying, "I can't sing at all."

Yet he overcomes this seemingly devastating handicap just by, quite literally, kicking out some jams. The beauty of live-band

karaoke, Porges says, is that the fluid motion of jump kicking an accompanying final crash cymbal or the swagger of a good Mick Jagger strut can balance out the tonelessness.

Porges walked the globe in search of the perfect karaoke fix. He took to the stage in NYC, Santiago, and Tokyo, but he assures me that right now Chicago is, by far, the best place in the world for karaoke.

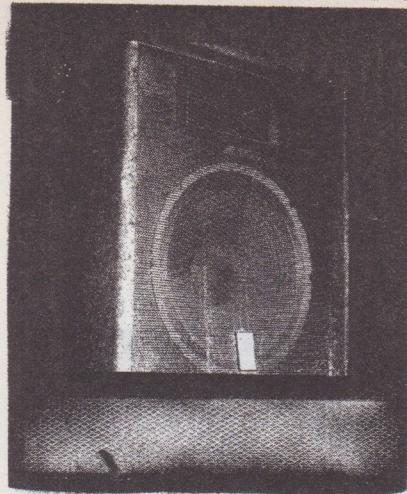
Between songs and sweaty nods of approval, he encourages me to speak with tonight's host, MC Kevin Brennan. The much-hailed and energetic master of ceremonies has the job of announcing the next name on the sign-up sheet and then, with or without agitation, mocking the performers. He's the lion-tamer in this big, loud—and soused—circus.

But Kevin also encompasses a curious trend in rock'n'roll karaoke: the alter-ego. While some karaoke-goers adopt costumes and alternate personalities for their night out—including cameos from Rory the Mullet Man and a cape-adorned 80-year-old—Kevin's other "personality" is the seditious Barry LaCroix, a man of ill repute for leering at women and mocking the men. He's not exactly a guy you would expect to manifest from Kevin, a 25-year-old Texas-born Chicago convert with a generally charming stage personality and a JFK Jr-esque smile.

Kevin and I set up a time to talk, but it's really Barry that I want to meet.

"Barry?" Kevin hesitates, smirking. "Oh, I dunno. I hear that guy is bad news."

I finally meet the predatory Barry LaCroix for the first time the following Wednesday. He was in a ruffled tuxedo shirt, a cheesy jacket and slacks and horrible shoes. His hair was slicked towards



the back of his head and he wore a pair of heart-shaped sunglasses that he never once removed.

He creepily kisses my hand and throws an arm around me. "An interview? Well, Special-ness," as Barry is keen on calling me, "I'll be at your beck and call if you can promise me a lay."

I assure him that I enjoy journalistic integrities that *thankfully* prevent me from making such promises and implementation thereof. Barry bleats out a comic-book giggle, which is a token accessory to his on-stage persona. After a few minutes, his hand made a steady migration to my back's southern region. A few minutes later, he swaggered to the stage calling certain male participants ugly names and exercising the flexible nature of the F-bomb.

I can't publish most of what Barry said when I met him next. He made a fuss about me not buying him gin and tonics. He sat with his legs wide apart, rubbing his belly fuzz between the buttons of his shirt with his forefinger and sniggering through his sunglasses. The glasses, he says, were a gift from a Buddhist monk and block out the hatred of humanity.

"Plus, they give me X-ray vision."

He then proceeds to compare himself to the Dalai Lama, Einstein and Jesus Christ. He loves karaoke almost as much as he loves women. Apparently, he and Kevin are roommates, though they never seem to be in the apartment at the same time.

A Star is Born

Another week and Barry's nowhere to be seen. Instead, it's MC Kevin calling my name from the stage. I'm up. I went up and showed the band my selection, telling them by verse two to do something different. They smiled and nodded and I was excited, knowing that they'd pull it off, though unsure if I would. I swallowed hard. I don't even like singing in the shower.

A familiar keyboard line fills the monitors after I give a go-ahead nod, shifting my feet a little and devoting the song to my second-grade boyfriend.

"At first I was afraid."

In fact, I was petrified. I didn't know how this song would go over without the words memorized. But then, "I've spent so many nights wondering how I'd do it wrong."

I turned to the band, and whispered, "2/4 punk rock."

The music zoomed in and before I knew it, my mouth was

THEY SMILED AND NODDED AND I WAS EXCITED, KNOWING THAT THEY'D PULL IT OFF, THOUGH UNSURE IF I WOULD. I SWALLOWED HARD. I DON'T EVEN LIKE SINGING IN THE SHOWER.

open and out flew, "And now you're BACK! From outer-SPAAAACE!" Screaming, twisting like a nautical disaster, pointing out to fists and mouths singing along to "I Will Survive" at its most raucously offensive volume. Twice its normal tempo and me clawing the air with my free hand, white knuckling the mic with my other, my knees on the ground and piping yelps like an angst arena-rock riot.

Suddenly, I was no longer a writer anymore. I was Gladys Gaynor, Gloria's evil twin sister. The band picked up my guise with backup vocals, instrumental solos and all. I danced; we all danced. I threw my rumpled lyrics in the face of my friends and kicked a monitor grill. My final "survive" sustained longer than an inhuman "Star-Spangled Banner," I heard cheers coming from the bar, tapping on tables and a deep belly laugh coming from MC Kevin. Was I supposed to curtsey now? I stupidly blushed and walked off the stage, hoping, praying somebody would sing CCR tonight. I was dizzy. I had to sit down.

Places like the Underground Lounge really fit the bill for high- and low-end vagabonds in Billy Joel's "Piano Man." The microphone really does smell like a beer. It's a strange community of people getting a good laugh at their own expenses, a catharsis for both the inner-child and inner-musician. Some don't even sing (and many others don't sign up in time to get on stage).

Aaron Williamson, 23, is one of the former, taking the time every week from 10 to two as a break from his nine to five. "I come out because the whiskey is cheap and every once in a while someone gets up who makes me think, 'They're much worse than I am.'"

For Underground Lounge bartender Mike Holman the mix of patrons, music, and rock'n'roll seemed like a match made in hell. But somehow, he says, it works. "At first it looks like a scene out of *West Side Story*, with the younger crowd kids and the working people of Chicago squaring off," he says. "But for whatever reason, everyone's happy and together by the end of the night."

In a song created, perhaps, for the explicit purpose of being sung by a half-sober community of wanna-be rock stars, the entire crowd pants out Journey with a little sentiment in our hearts as scarves re-wrap their owners in exodus at 2 a.m.

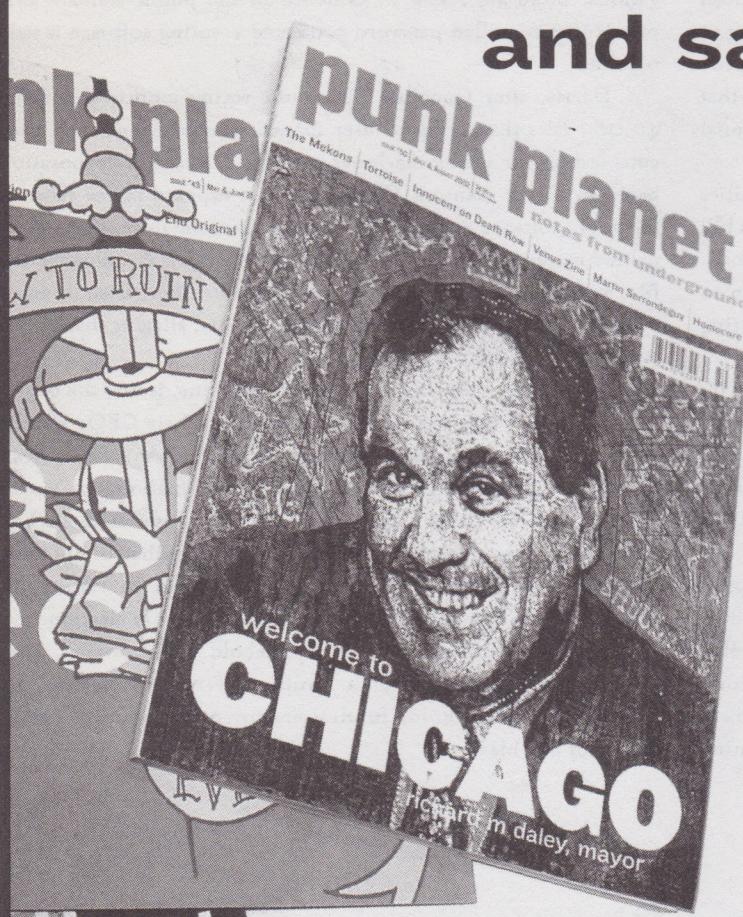
"Dooon't STOP buh-leeevin'!"

Of course we won't!

"Hooold on to the feelin'!"

Of course, until the next week, we will. ☺

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It seems fitting that a president who was brought into office because of a controversial election would enact a law to overhaul the electoral process to make it easier for people to choose their leaders the second time around. The disastrous 2000 presidential election and the subsequent ballot recount in Florida, in which hanging chads made it nearly impossible to figure out whether people in the Sunshine State voted for Al Gore or George Bush, led to a full-scale campaign by lawmakers to outlaw paper balloting in favor of user-friendly computerized voting machines.

That campaign came to a head with the passage of the Omnibus Appropriations Bill, signed into law by President Bush last year. The law is forcing states to switch from paper balloting to fully computerized systems—a move that is currently rife with programming and security flaws and is incapable of being audited—that could call into question the legitimacy of future local and national elections and put the wrong candidates into office.

The Omnibus Bill contains \$1.5 billion to fund activities related to the Help America Vote Act, a federal election reform bill that provides money to states for the improvement of elections, including \$15 million to the General Services Administration to reimburse states that purchased optical scan or electronic voting equipment prior to the November 2000 election.

With the 2004 presidential election less than a year away, critics of e-voting fear that mass hacking and voter fraud could put the wrong person in office next November. A grass-roots campaign is currently underway to force states to either temporarily do away with the electronic voting machine or implement a system that will offer a printout of the votes so that it can be audited.

"No one knows how many elections have actually been misprogrammed, and as we eliminate paper ballots, no one will ever know," Bev Harris, a Seattle resident who runs a small public relations business and is credited with uncovering the flaws in electronic voting machines, told Buzzflash.com. "We do know that errors as high as 25 percent are not uncommon, and software programming

errors have been documented as high as 100 percent. In one small Iowa county, a single machine miscounted by three million votes." Harris has recently written a book on the e-voting subject called *Black Box Voting: Ballot Tampering in the 21st Century*.

Right now, the biggest problem plaguing electronic voting is security of the system. Critics of e-voting claim any computer hacker with a political axe to grind can hack into the system, monitor balloting and, if the vote is going the wrong way, mobilize voters to swing the election.

Although there hasn't been any evidence to back up these allegations, there are reams of evidence in the public domain that proves that so-called password protected e-voting software is vulnerable.

Harris, after Googling "electronic voting", uncovered some 40,000 files that included user manuals, source code, and executable files for voting machines made by Diebold, a corporation based in North Canton, Ohio. The files exposed massive flaws in Diebold's software and all but handed hackers the instruction manual for manipulating the e-voting software. Harris downloaded the files and posted them on her website. In September, Diebold temporarily shut down her blackboxvoting.com site, alleging that Harris stole their copyrighted material.

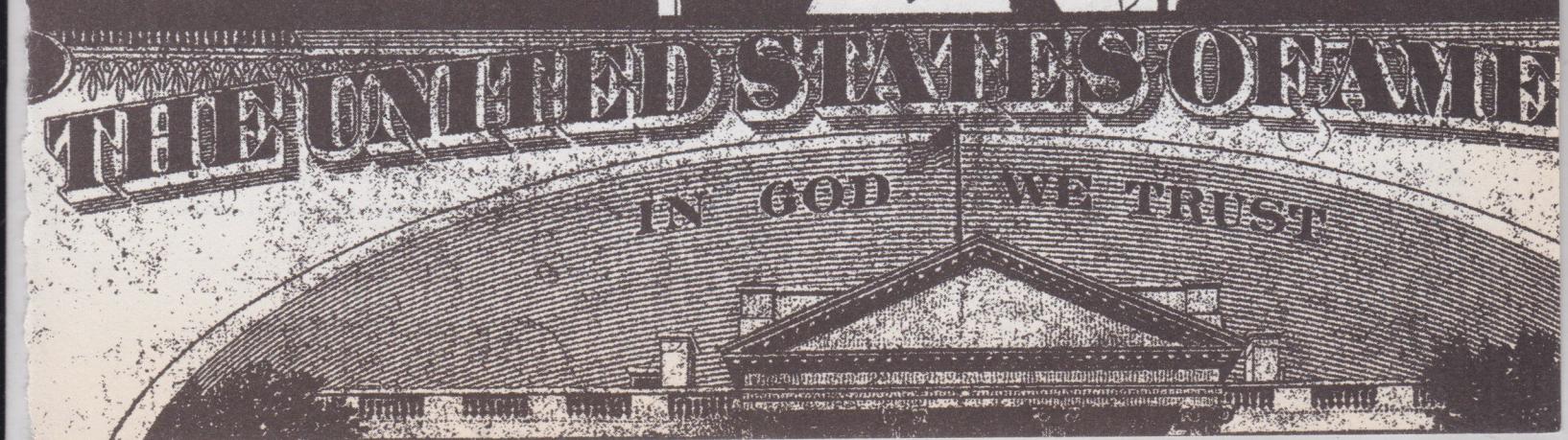
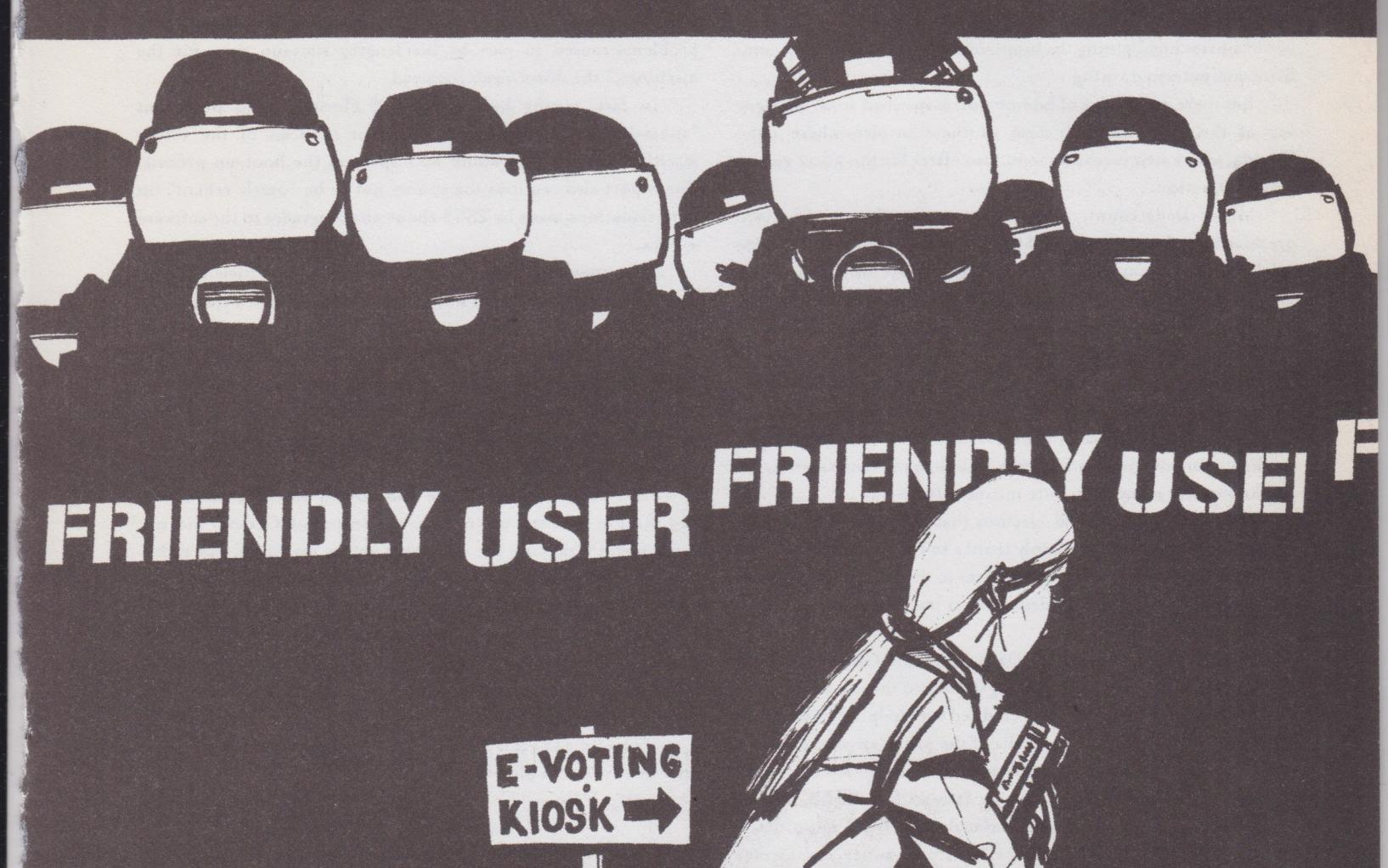
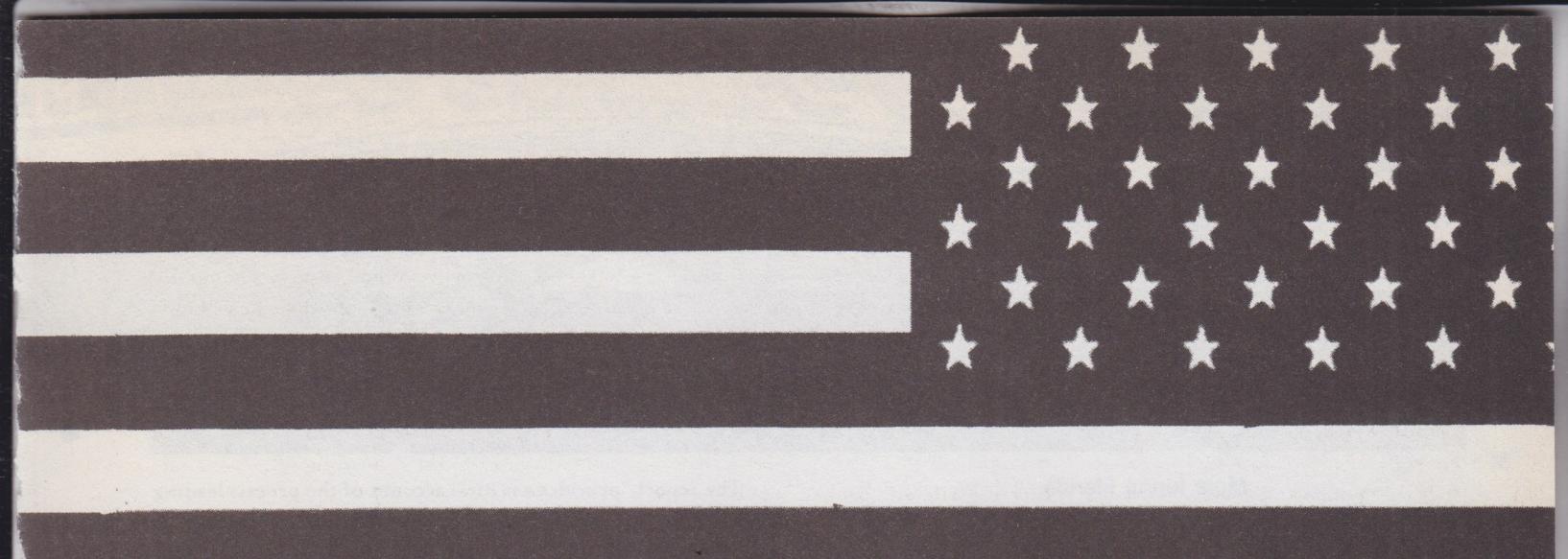
Diebold, the developer of the ATM machine, is now the largest supplier of e-voting software in the country. Their CEO, Walden O'Dell, is also a staunch Republican supporter. At a Republican fundraiser, O'Dell promised the president that his company would "deliver" the necessary votes needed to keep Bush in the White House for a second term. Noting the potential conflict-of-interest, Democrats in Congress are calling for Diebold to remove its machines from being used during next year's primary election.

However, Michelle Griggs, a Diebold spokeswoman, dismissed any appearance of a conflict-of-interest saying the company routinely holds fundraisers for other political causes absent of any bias.

CAN THE "RIGHT" VOTING SYSTEM PUT THE WRONG CANDIDATE IN OFFICE?

THE BUSINESS OF E-VOTING

BY JASON LEOPOLD
ILLUSTRATION BY BRIAN WOOD





DIEBOLD, THE DEVELOPER OF THE ATM MACHINE, IS NOW THE LARGEST SUPPLIER OF E-VOTING SOFTWARE IN THE COUNTRY. THEIR CEO, WALDEN O'DELL IS ALSO A SAUNCH REPUBLICAN SUPPORTER. AT A REPUBLICAN FUNDRAISER, O'DELL PROMISED THE PRESIDENT THAT HIS COMPANY WOULD "DELIVER" THE NECESSARY VOTES NEEDED TO KEEP BUSH IN THE WHITE HOUSE FOR A SECOND TERM.

More fun in Florida

While much ink has been spilled in the mainstream media on the so-called benefits of computerized voting (cheaper, faster, more reliable), you would be hard-pressed to find an equal number of stories highlighting the more ominous side effects that come from computerized voting.

But there are dozens of horror stories spawned from the signing of the Omnibus Bill: most of these involve—where else—Florida, where new machines went into effect for the 2002 gubernatorial election.

Miami-Dade county, still licking its wounds over the 2000 presidential election, spent \$24.5 million for 7,200 voting machines, but many polling places opened late or did not have enough machines up and running. Many poll workers had problems collecting votes from the machines, delaying the final results of the election for a week.

In one precinct, the new touch-screen equipment used during the September 2002 election wrongfully registered a vote for GOP incumbent Jeb Bush when votes were cast for the Democratic candidate for governor because of a "misaligned" touch screen. No one knows how many votes were misrecorded.

The November general election that followed was relatively glitch-free in the county, mainly thanks to the fact that the logistics of the election had been turned over to the Miami-Dade Police Department and the county dedicated at least three employees to each polling place.

In May 2003, the Miami-Dade Inspector General released the results of a seven-month investigation into the use of the electronic voting machines that were credited with helping Bush secure a second term in office. The results of the probe are damning.

For one, the company that sold the touch-screen voting machines to Miami-Dade, Electronic Systems & Software, a company with close ties to Republican lawmakers in Washington, DC—Senator Chuck Hagel (R-Nebraska), was part owner and former chairman and chief executive of ES&S (the company that made all the equipment that counted the votes during his last two runs for office) yet he failed to list his ties to the company on federal disclosure forms—county misled county officials about the equipment and delivered goods that were not the cutting edge technology the county expected. In fact, the report notes that the processor for each machine is an Intel 386 EX processor—technology that is more than a decade old.

The report "provides a critical account of the process leading to the \$25 million purchase of a voting system that was expected to lead to trouble-free elections. Instead, the Sept. 10, 2002, election—a national black eye for Miami-Dade—was plagued with problems caused in part by the lengthy start-up time for the machines," the *Miami Herald* reported.

In fact, testing by the State of Florida found numerous "anomalies and deficiencies" in newer versions of the voting machine software that would have sped up the boot-up process. The report also cautions the county not to be "overly reliant" on representations made by ES&S about what upgrades to the software will do.

The report also found that ES&S told county officials that its electronic voting machines would provide voters with a system that could run a trilingual ballot, in English, Spanish, and Creole. In its oral sales presentation, ES&S told the county that having a trilingual system would not require additional data capacity. Yet, the company's own documentation from 2001 indicates that the type of files that would be required for such a system would require an additional storage device.

Still, because Miami-Dade had already invested more than \$25 million into the technology, the Inspector General did not recommend scrapping the electronic voting machines, but rather to work within the limitations of the system and "hope" that it will pull off a successful general election come 2004.

For Linda Rodriguez-Taseff, president of the South Florida chapter of the American Civil Liberties Union and a leading advocate of voting reform in Miami-Dade, elections are too important to leave up to "hope."

"The time to act is now," she says. "Let's scrap this system and get a new system in place."

Keeping up the count

Despite the known problems like these—and many others—it's become difficult for county officials in Miami-Dade and other counties using these types of systems to challenge the results of tainted elections.

The problem with the Omnibus Bill, according to Rebecca Mercuri, a computer science professor at Bryn Mawr College in Pennsylvania and one of the most vocal opponents of paperless balloting, is that it leaves no paper trail, making it ripe for manipulation.

"Any programmer can write code that displays one thing on a screen, records something else, and prints yet another result," Mercuri told Commondreams.org. "There is no known way to ensure that this is not happening inside of a voting system. No electronic voting system has been certified to even the *lowest* level of the US government or international computer security standards."

In order for an electronic voting system to be foolproof, Mercuri says, five components must be present—a voter, a ballot, a computerized voting machine, a printer, and an optical scanner—and three basic steps must be taken.

"First, the voting machine registers a voter's selection both electronically and on a paper ballot," she explained. "Second, the machine then displays the paper ballot behind clear glass or plastic so that the voter can review their selection, but not take the ballot home by mistake. If the voter's selection doesn't agree with the ballot or the voter makes a mistake, the voter can call a poll worker to void the ballot, and then re-vote. And third, the paper ballot is optically scanned—most likely at the county administration building—providing a second electronic tally. If anything goes wrong with either the voting machines or the optical scanner, the paper ballots can be hand-counted as a last resort or as part of an audit. And voila! We have a fully auditable voting system with checks and balances, review and redundancy."

But systems like the type Mercuri describes are costly and the companies that make them hide their programming behind "trade secrets" which make it next to impossible to conduct an independent analysis of the technology.

In city council elections in Palm Beach last March, when a losing candidate challenged the results, a local judge denied the challenger and his consultant the opportunity to inspect the machines, citing the rights of the manufacturer, Sequoia, to protect its trade secrets.

In February 2003, Daniel Spillane blew the whistle on his former employer, VoteHere—a privately held electronic voting machine company in Washington DC run by a former senior military aide to Vice President Dick Cheney and whose board includes former CIA Director Robert Gates—claiming the company's patented digital balloting software contained severe programming errors, which could lead to, among other disasters, the massive deletion of ballots.

Spillane, who was fired from VoteHere in 2001, alleged in a wrongful termination lawsuit against his former employer that VoteHere undertook measures to thwart an independent review of its software. Spillane says he voiced his concerns with company executives and that he was fired hours before VoteHere was scheduled to meet with representatives from the Independent Test Authority, an auditing group that scrutinizes electronic voting

equipment and software, and the US General Accounting Office.

Spillane is one of a half-dozen experts to question the wisdom behind the Omnibus bill. He, Mercuri, and 453 other technologists endorsed the "Resolution on Electronic Voting", which warns of the dangers inherent in electronic voting systems that keep only digital records of ballots cast. The resolution states that programming error, equipment malfunction, and malicious tampering are serious risks which call for a voter-verifiable audit trail—a permanent, physical, tamper-resistant record of each vote which can be checked by the voter before casting their ballot, and retained afterward.

The *San Francisco Chronicle* is one of only a handful of news organizations to call into question the veracity of electronic voting following reports like Spillane and Mercuri's resolution. With Santa Clara County in the process of upgrading their voting machines, the *Chronicle's* investigation was well timed.

David Dill, professor of computer science at Stanford University and leader of an anti-electronic voting campaign, told the *Chronicle* that the electronic voting machines Santa Clara planned to purchase "pose an unacceptable risk that errors or deliberate election-rigging will go undetected, since they do not provide a way for the voters to verify independently that the machine correctly records and counts the votes they have cast."

Dill, in consultation with his Stanford colleagues and other experts, had voiced their concern via a petition urging that voting machines not be purchased or used unless they provide a voter-verifiable audit trail, according to the *Chronicle*.

Where such machines are already in use, the petition stated, they should be replaced or modified to provide such a record. Dill had collected the signatures of hundreds of technologists, including many of the best-known names in computer science, security and election technology.

Despite the *Chronicle's* critical report, Santa Clara County made its final decision recently to spend \$20 million on 5,000 touch-screen voting booths made by Sequoia—yet another company with questionable political connections—most of which will not include a printed audit trail.

While a growing chorus of computer experts say touch-screen voting machines should be overhauled because software glitches, blackouts, and even possibly hackers could delete or alter voting data and recounts would prove impossible without a verifiable paper trail, the issue has not raised many eyebrows in Washington. Lawmakers, still smarting from the 2000 election, are quick to write off the analysis of academics and journalists as "conspiracy theories" and feel that the faster they can implement them, the better. But people like Dill, Spillane, and Mercuri believe that speed should not take precedence over accuracy. They believe our democracy is counting on it. ☺

THE MIAMI-DADE INSPECTOR GENERAL RELEASED THE RESULTS OF A SEVEN-MONTH INVESTIGATION INTO THE USE OF THE ELECTRONIC VOTING MACHINES THAT WERE CREDITED WITH HELPING BUSH SECURE A SECOND TERM IN OFFICE. THE RESULTS OF THE PROBE ARE DAMNING.



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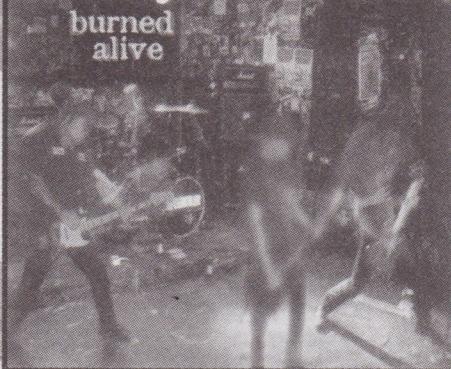
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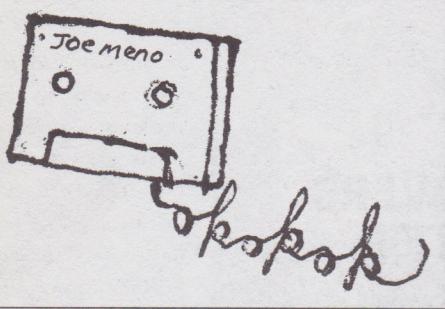
joe meno

janelle benet ramsey

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jessica hopper

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painting of Mötley Crüe as they appeared on the inside cover of their *Shout at the Devil* record, and a black and white etching of a banana happily chasing a donut. Our art teacher, Ms. Jaros, was very laid-back, with big bifocal glasses, short blonde hair, always wearing a blue smock and telling us to really express ourselves. When some of the older kids in class who were seniors and serious stoners started making pipes and bongs to smoke weed out of, Ms. Jaros pretended not to know what these funny ceramic things were going to be used for. Nothing was ever graded, you know, she just wanted us to make shit, which, looking back now, seems like a weird and lovely concept.

The best things I ever made in that class were silk screen black and white T-shirts for a band, my band, which did not even exist, because I did not know how to play an instrument and did not even own one yet. The name of the band was Reckless Youth! with the exclamation point! and the design was pretty simple: a fist with deteriorated-looking lettering, which I pretty much-ripped off from the Misfits. I only made five T-shirts, one for me, four for my pals, and we all started wearing them, to the food court at the mall, to parties in people's basements when their parents were out of town, even at home, alone, when I didn't have anyone but myself to lie to and try to impress. Brian O'Malley, my pal, even drew the logo on the back of his jean jacket, Reckless Youth! like it meant something. People would ask, usually some pretty, dark-eyed girl who worked at Cinnabon or The Canary and the Elephant, "Is that your band?" and I'd be all, "You bet." Then they'd ask, "Where are you guys playing next?" and I'd be all, "Well, we're still getting our songs together." We weren't getting our songs together because no

I am a Poser

In high school, all the dorks took art class. I was a dork so I took art class and ended up making a green ceramic gnome, a terrible pastel

one had any instruments. Brian Newman had a keyboard, but we weren't sure we even wanted keyboard in the band. Keyboard seemed way too Deep Purple or Bon Jovi.

At some point, I did get a guitar and I did start playing in bands, but it was like months later, months after this imaginary band Reckless Youth! broke up. It was pretty retarded. I mean we hadn't even practiced together once and somehow we had managed to break up, and still, we had these very excellent-looking T-shirts. So that all that was left was an idea of who we wanted to be, but no means to that idea, no way to make that dream happen, and so, we just settled for the illusion of the dream. We were seriously motherfucking posing.

• • •

Then there was Kate Fox, the ultimate poser, who, like overnight or something, decided she was going to be British. Seriously. One weekend, I saw her blowing massive chunks behind this kid, Guido's, house, laughing and giggling and shouting, "Oh my God, is that a hot dog? I don't even remember eating a hot dog!" and the next weekend, she had cut most of her hair off and was seriously talking with a British accent, using British words and phrases like they were nothing.. I was all, "Hey, Kate, what's up?" and she was like, "Bloody nothing," and I was like, "Yeah. So you get any good records lately?" and she was like, "I'm not listening to nothing but Elvis Costello now, mate." I kind of walked away, staring at her like I was in a fog. At the end of the night, she was making out with some dude I didn't know, and months later, I heard she got pregnant. Some time after that, maybe a year, I saw her working at a McDonald's by my house. She had the little red visor on and nametag, "Kate," and she looked at me, recognized me, and just said, "May I help you?" like she was too embarrassed to admit she fucking knew me. There were other kids like her, kids who one day were into hardcore and the next all into ska, or kids who got really into rap, who, the week before had been wearing Anthrax Ts. It never really bothered me because I had this idea that I could only be cool for about 15 minutes before someone discovered I was a dork anyway. Maybe, if you pretended to be something more than you were, you could work against that time limit, you could trick yourself into thinking you were better than you actually were maybe.

If the 1980s taught us anything, it was how important image really was, and how much of that image relied on pure fucking fantasy, the ultimate pose, the superstar of rock pose. No longer were you content to listen to music, you had to watch it and believe its uncanny, unreal, and bizarre myths as well. With the onset of MTV, kids of the '80s, watching godlike, one-named musical superstars like Prince and Madonna, had to wonder how much of that staged vision was actually real. Did Prince really walk around in those unbuttoned puffy pirate shirts all the time? Did Madonna really want to fuck us as much as she really wanted us to think she did? How much of these people's lives, these rockers you put up on your bedroom wall, how much of these people were actually real? Would we be cool, better people, if we only tried to believe?

•••

At the punk and rock shows here in Chicago, sometimes I look around, trying to figure people out. It gets to be like maybe you think you have x-ray vision or something. I see the very young kids with their Crass and Ramones shirts and patches, images from an era almost twice as old as the people wearing them. I see the 20-year-olds, with their purposefully vacant looks, crossing their arms in front of their chests as if to say, *Look, Look, I'm so fucking bored*, and the older folks, dudes in their 30s or older, still desperately trying to hang on something that seems to be slipping away. Sometimes I start to get judgmental. I start to think everyone around me is kind of putting on an act, that everyone in one way or another is kind of phony. But then I remember something, something important about those stupid band Ts I made in art class freshman year: everyone I know is always somewhere between who they are and pretending who they'd like to be. Everybody is always and constantly reinventing themselves and ultimately posing. Maybe you have to, if you ever want to do anything. Maybe dreaming yourself up as something else, someone smarter, better, more charming, is the only way you can convince yourself you're good enough to do anything. What we have together, in common then, is that all of us are constantly trying to be the better people we are dreaming ourselves to be. In the end, then, that thing in common is something.

Hi, I'm the new guy. Reach me at joe@bailmag.com.



Buddhists advise you to exist in the moment. Dead poets warn you to use it before the worms get it. Even hairy-ass Robin Williams once bid audiences to "seize the day." All words of wisdom lost on me. Just another fast food wrapper blowing alongside the highway inside my head. I'm always daydreaming about the future. Living someplace where it snows, putting out a record, what kind of dog I'm going to get to live with me in the trailer I may someday own and will, with any luck, park by the ocean. Maybe in Hawaii. The only presents I'm fully committed to are the transitory periods. Moments when I'm running away from something ugly and confining. When I'm in the process of getting to someplace unknown and not yet drained of all its promise. I love the feeling of having power over myself and my situation. Reminding myself that I can hop in a car and change my destiny, just like that, any time I want. What can I say? I'm hooked on a feeling. I'm addicted to acts of reckless escape.

It's this recklessness, this need to escape by any means necessary that found me touring in a band called Suburban Bitch last summer. It may have contributed to how we ended up with a shaky tour schedule and a cursed van that, while quite a looker, only went 35 mph over the mountains that perpetually plagued the first three days of our tour. A tour in which we suffered a pregnancy scare, an alley fight with rednecks, vehicular breakdowns (the first one within 40 miles of home), barfing illness, exhaustion, sleeping in ditches, overcrowding (eight in the van), all in the first five days of tour. However, we were a feisty and determined lot. After each catastrophe, I would wipe the barf from my chin, kick my feet up on the dashboard, and fish out the directions to the next town, eager to see what the next show might have in store for us.

That is, until we got our asses kicked, once and with great finality, by the state of Wisconsin.

The towtruck dragged our smoking van off the highway and dumped us at a Citgo parking lot in a place called the Wisconsin Dells. Not a town so much as a tourist trap. Not a tourist trap so much as a surrealist nightmare.

We were stuck in the Citgo parking lot for two days. Buzz and I slept in a field by the Pirate's Cove Mini Golf billboard on the first night. The mosquitoes who bombarded us that night would be the only Dells residents to welcome us in the days to come. Nobody was sympathetic to our situation. No one would loan us tools. The manager of the Citgo yelled at us for making his gas station look bad. The merchants of the Dells had the humanity trampled from their hearts by the white sneakers of 500,000 tourists long ago. They did everything but grab torches and pitchforks to run us out of town.

Finally, at the end of the second day, a trio of kindly speed freaks with a van in just marginally better condition than our own offered to drive our raggedy crew to Milwaukee. Everyone immediately began rolling up sleeping bags and stuffing journals and socks into backpacks, except for Buzz. The noble sea captain who would lash himself to the prow of his sinking ship and me, the glutton for punishment, who would stay with him, no matter what. It was with a heavy hand that I waved good-bye to my comrades as they prepared to roll away from this most heartless oasis on earth in our only escape pod. Melissa swore that she would find a way to rescue us. Buzz dismissed this offering of false hope with a wave of his cigarette and called back, "Just remember us as we were."

The Wisconsin Dells is the tourist trap to end all tourist traps. Like a G-Rated Las Vegas, equally as formidable in its gaudiness and its reliance on tourists burdened with fat wallets. A dazzling spectacle incongruously slam-dunked in the middle of nowhere. Who figured out that the middle of bullshit Wisconsin was the ideal location to erect this sprawling Mecca of family fun?

It was pouring down rain as we sat inside the broken van, planning our next move. I convinced Buzz, humiliating though it may be, that we could use my mom's credit card number to get a motel room. As we tramped up the main drag, our senses were immediately assailed by overwhelming tributes to decadence from all sides. Willy Wonka would've told the Dells forefathers to tone it down a notch. Liberace would've advised them to quit being so tacky. Unlike most tourist traps, there is no unified theme in the Wisconsin Dells. The Trojan horse go-karts live in harmony alongside Tommy Bartlett's Robot World. Paul Bunyan extends a friendly tip of his wool cap to the Haunted Castle down the road from his All-You-Can-Eat flapjack buffet. The Mystery Mansion coexists unthreatened by the more in-your-face tactics employed by the bungee jump across the road. There's Storybook Gardens for the kids, Extreme World for the teens, and amphibious military vehicles for Dad.

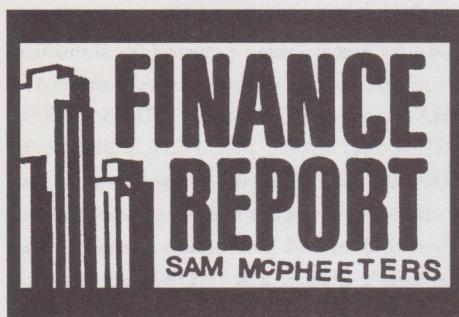
And endless tangles of waterslides EVERYWHERE. If you unwound all of the waterslides in the Dells and lined them up end-to-end, they would wrap around the earth nine times. That's a fact. The brochures tell no lies. There is truly something for everyone

in the Wisconsin Dells. Unless you are broke. And dirty. And trapped. Then the Dells are not such a warm and fuzzy sanctuary. Buzz and I walked for miles upon miles down the main drag in the pouring rain. It was Saturday night and families swarmed the Dells like ants on a forsaken hoagie. Each motel we passed had a glaring NO VACANCY accompanying the tropical fish or Neptune King of the Sea caricature adorning their signs. The very few motels boasting of a vacancy had desk clerks manning the offices who all but spit in our faces when we walked in. I had taken the care to tuck my punky red hair into a baseball cap, but the desk clerks were onto us like an airport dog on a suitcase full of weed. They had been well-trained in sniffing out poverty. No, the only room they had available was a \$290-a-night family suite, with a mandatory two-night stay. No, they could not recommend another motel. Yes, we had better keep walking. The motels began petering out a bit. The grand indoor tidal wave pools, on-site mini golf, and robotic arm Ferris wheel gave way to funkier themes. An eight-foot slide with a pink and silver unicorn on the side. A leprechaun fountain and a shamrock-shaped picnic table. It was on the far side of our own personal Trail of Tears that we found a motel that would take us. Ninety dollars a night with a minimum two-night stay. I knew they were tearing me a new one, but what could I do? It was raining too hard to sleep outside and the horny-looking speed freak had vowed to come check on us in the van that night. Most of all, I had become demoralized. I was sick of barfing. Sick of being punched in the face. Sick of planning how to kill a fetus while on the road. Sick of being sober and stressed-out and trying to make everything work out. I wanted to sleep indoors, in a bed, and recuperate for a night. The desk clerk who fleeced me was cross-eyed and borderline retarded. I was filling out the registry form when his wife came in from the back. She took one look at me, and tore up my registration form. My jaw dropped in shock. How could she poke a hole in my lifeboat? What kind of non-Christian acts did she think we were going to perform on her property? I argued with her. I attempted to appeal to her sense of fair play and to her sense of pity, but she was an unrepentant harpy. Defeated, I stormed outside and sat on their picnic table under a toadstool umbrella, trying not to start bawling. Buzz was furious and gearing up to fist-fight the retarded man and his wife. He threw a soda can at the office, an unmistakable invitation to bring it on. I shook off my pity party, convinced him that we'd get revenge later, and that we should check out the motel across the street in the meantime.

The desk clerk across the road was an 11-year-old Greek girl who happily and obliviously rented us a room. The room had cable and was '70s-tacky in a way that never fails to soothe me. Dangling, round, frosted lampshades, interlocking orange and yellow circle bedspread. I immediately drew the drapes to keep the monsters of the Dells at bay and turned on the Biography channel to fill my head with thoughts of someone else. It was like being hunkered down in a foxhole, reading comic books while waiting for the next round of bombs to go off. How had my escape plan gone so terribly awry? I

felt like a goldfish who had tried leaping for freedom and wound up on the floor instead, stupidly suffocating. What does it mean when your escape plan needs an escape plan? When this many things go wrong, you can't help but deduce that a higher power is trying to tell you something. I will never give up on my escape schemes, but maybe next summer, I'll try something new. Whatever that may entail—a fishing trip, selling jeans in Japan, staying at a trailer park in Bisbee, Arizona—I know that it won't, and never will again, involve Wisconsin. I should've listened to the Crucifucks.

Huge thanks to Robert and Karoline for acts of heroism above and beyond the call of duty. Write to me! PO Box 4047, Berkeley, CA. 94704. janellebenetramsey@excite.com



crews as a bad thing. And yet there they are, clogging up streets and office lobbies and public sidewalks. I've had walks through Union Station where two completely separate film crews hogged up different parts of the building. A friend once showed me a notice left on his door, informing him that the neighborhood would be subjected to "full-load automatic gunfire". Driving home last spring, a cop stopped me at the intersection of Hope and 6th while a film crew detonated a fireball that climbed to eight stories—I counted windows—in the street ahead of me. Under mayors Riordan and Hahn, filming has drastically increased in Los Angeles over the last decade. The exasperation factor has followed close behind.

So when my ex-employee Anthony asked if I wanted a one-day job as an extra, I was startled by my own enthusiasm. Through connections of his own, Anthony had brokered all his friends into a video shoot for rising Australian pop star Holly Valance. And it would all be for a good cause. The filming was to take place at The Smell, the great L.A. nightclub shuttered for six months as a casualty of the post-Great White fire safety crackdown. Much work had been done by friends and colleagues to get the place up to code—drywall, plumbing, painting. Being an extra seemed almost an extension of this labor, one final task to be performed before The Smell could reopen.

That Wednesday morning I found parking in the L.A. Times lot a block away, already down eight dollars for the day. In the concrete lot two doors down from The Smell, I greeted pals John Fones and Christina and Kelly, the way one greets friends outside a high school on the first day of a new school year. Christina and Kelly had just moved from the east coast, and I was able to view them as like-

minded souls on the filming mystique. The lot was filled with trucks and cables and lights and trailers. The theme for the day was "80s" punk, and all of us had half-assedly attempted to fit the bill.

A large canopy had been erected towards the back of the lot, under which we joined a group of about 50 extras, half Smell regulars, half clients of a casting company called Scotty's Bodies. Lines were formed, contracts signed, Polaroids taken and costume tent triage performed on the basis of our 1980s style. That John Fones made the cut didn't surprise me. With his week-old crew cut, upturned jacket collar and square tie, he looked like a *Blade Runner* impersonator, if there ever was such a thing. That I made the costume cut was strange. I was wearing my lucky cowboy shirt, untucked, and the black frame glasses old age has forced on me. Over the course of the day I would be called many names—"Cowboy Bob", "Buddy Holly", "Drew Carey"—with no root in the 1980s. I noticed that women were hauled off to the costume tent in a much higher ratio than men. Later, I noticed copies of Jim Jocoy's *We're Desperate* photobook used as reference by the costume department, a certain cheap exploitative look.

"We're desperate" seemed to sum up the Scotty's Bodies crowd. To work in entry-level Hollywood with a straight face requires some stoic insecurity found in few other professions. The discovery that we were not, for example, to be referred to as "extras" but as some even lower caste called "background" seemed to draw groans only from The Smell regulars. When young Jeremy, drummer for The Wives, attempted to steal a whole pineapple off the catering table, Scotty's Bodies looked the other way, unwilling to acknowledge any risk to this nano-progression in their acting careers (I looked the other way too, but only because I'm paranoid about getting beaten by key grips).

After two hours of avoiding the sun, my name and Christina's name were read off a short list by a crewhand, and we were discretely informed that we would not be offered any work that day, although we could audit the shoot for no money. In anger, I returned to the catering table and crammed as much crisp fruit and goat cheese as I could fit into my mouth. Someone suggested calling Anthony, who was in New York. I did this. Anthony grew enraged, had me find the producer and put him on the phone. I watched this man walk around the set for what seemed like a long time, wondering at what point my life had jumped the tracks so radically that I was fighting to stay on the set. The producer returned and said we could remain. I understood the paradox I had just helped create. If Anthony was once my employee and he now had the power to keep people on movie sets... didn't this chain of command somehow grant me authority over the entire shoot?

The sun crept up and up, eating into our cramped shade. At some point Kelly's name was called and a crew hand led her away. At high noon the breakfast table was broken down and two caterers shoveled food into several oversized trash cans. A bum pushing a shopping cart down Main Street halted and stared. Fresh watermelon and cantaloupe and juice oranges, steaming oatmeal, muffins, croissants, bagels and lox... all gone.

"There go all the little boxes of Lucky Charms," I mumbled in grief to John Fones.

"They don't toss closed packages of cereal, idiot."

"You want to bet?"

He smiled. "Sure. Five dollars. You have five dollars?"

We shook hands as the workers carefully bundled up the cereal boxes and returned to their truck. I handed over my last five dollars. In the distance, the leg-shaped windsock on the roof of the Ronald Reagan building wagged down at us in mockery. We were to spend nine hours in this parking lot.

Here's what I did with my time: huddled in the shade of the producer's Toyota 4Runner; read the first eleven pages of *Red Badge of Courage*; discussed a one act musical I want to write starring Bad Brains' HR and Positive Force DC's Mark Andersen; listened in to a pair of Scotty's Bodies debate file sharing; ate several hundred Red Vines licorice sticks; read the entire *LA Times* from cover to cover; attempted to make a paper hat from the sports section; and tipped my chair back into the concrete, hard, smacking myself in the elbow and head for no good reason. Being an extra seems a lot like riding in a van across large states, in that it is very easy to have all motivation sucked from one's soul. It's also probably a lot like prison—long stretches of boredom interrupted by brief, intense spasms of violence. Only without the violence. And with great food. At two, after crew had gorged themselves, background were allowed lunch at long tables offering steaks, pasta, potatoes, Caesar salad, chocolate covered strawberries, fresh milkshakes and pretty much anything else from the food kingdom. I'd seen these types of tables all over the city, and it was with some sadness that I realized I was now too overheated to enjoy my inclusion. I ate in silence, trying to keep out of the killing sunshine. Kelly returned for lunch. "They had me do a lesbian make-out scene," she said sadly. She'd been in town less than three days and already the city had shown her its worst.

By three the sun was slanting along the far wall and I needed a vacation. There seemed to be no way for the crew to monitor our comings and goings. In front of the Main Street entrance to The Smell, next to a portable AC unit with its massive outtake hose snaking through the back doors, I saw two forlorn Mexican men selling flowers and eating spaghetti out of Styrofoam boxes. Overhead, pigeons flew in and out of the old Linda Lea sign next door. In the 1960s, the LL theater had been a Japanese Chambara filmhouse, and its faded beauty remains for the observant. Before the club's shutdown by fire marshals, plans had been drawn up to buy the Linda Lea theater, knock down some walls and triple The Smell's size, making it a central venue for independent music, film, theater and performance. Now the sign stood as another cracked-and spattered relic of ancient Los Angeles, a souvenir of lost possibilities.

I walked around to the small alley that fronts the club's entrance. There was a lot of debris here. Chest high weeds had flourished along the walls in the absence of urine. I remem-

bered a day I'd spent working at the place in the spring, when Anthony and I had to access the roof. After hoisting a 100 pound steel fan on a cherry picker, gently pulling aside barbed wire and bridging a two foot gap, we stood for a moment admiring the view, men for a day. From across Main Street a billboard for *The Core* shined at us. It was obvious that was where we needed to go next. The Core. This nice moment now seemed inverted in humiliation as I returned to the shady, condom-strewn grove I'd discovered between the catering truck and a brick wall. I realized I had no idea who I was working for. "Excuse me," I asked a crew member on the way back in, "what's the name of this production company?" The woman gave me a look of hateful L.A. professionalism. "What?"

At dusk we were herded into The Smell. I had been warned that the place had been made unrecognizable. A large fake aluminum light rig had been built on the stage, and the walls were covered in graffiti dada: NYHC, HATE, 187, BLOOD BROTHERS, SCREW THE LAW, PAY TO CUM, NO WAVE, PROTEST & SURVIVE, LEFT TO SUFFER, REAGAN YOUTH (much later I was to find out that most—but not all—of these slogans had been solicited from Anthony by the authenticity-famished production company... we both lamented that he hadn't slipped a RAHOWA on the list). Huge, red-gelled banks of lights pointed at the brick wall like space heaters, and within minutes all of us were dripping sweat. There was no respect for us background. Instead of even a "quiet on the set"—and when will I ever again get the opportunity to hear these words?—we were told to "shut the fuck up if you want to get paid."

One of Holly Valance's body doubles came out for light checks. The backup band was carefully arranged onstage. There was the Fred Durst guy on guitar, the black bassist with dreadlocks and a Motorhead shirt who actually practiced his chops between takes, the butch lady keyboardist who seemed unhappy. Holly arrived to pooped applause. We'd seen her briefly after lunch, being interviewed at a catering table with a prop bag of fast food. On stage, she appeared nearly naked, an unripe android wearing only a skimpy miniskirt with a sleeveless, braless Ramones shirt slit down both sides. This would be her "punk" video. Staffers were on hand to keep her boobs concealed with doubled sided tape.

Director Jake Nova arrived. Nova is known for having directed Beyoncé's "Crazy In Love" video, and this shoot was to be the same type of needlessly slutty affair, with one notable difference: Beyoncé's song is exceptional and Holly's song is a piece of thudding ass plop. Jake waved his arms a lot and said things like "Ok people, I want to see lots of that crazy, rock-punk energy, wild, wild, wild... just keep moving." He struck me as one of those fellows about whom it is impossible to tell if they are Australian or British. Smoke machines spewed. Fake set lists were scrawled. With the crew high on stress and the background high on heatstroke, unreality set in as we leapt and slammed to the cheap music.

The song was stopped for a few minutes while technicians frantically checked light levels. I scanned the walls of this now

unfamiliar room with a heavy heart. The last band to play the club had been The Whip, four months before their drummer Scott Jernigan was killed in a boating accident. As soon as their set had ended that February night, the fire inspectors arrived, the wages of more tragedy in Rhode Island. This whole video shoot seemed terribly disrespectful of the chain of events that lead to its happening in this building.

Things went ugly only during the "mosh pit" scene. Background were arranged in a circle around a writhing Holly. Stagehands sprayed Holly's arms and face with glycerin for a postcoital sheen, the song was again pumped and we all jumped and surged like morons in a music video. At some point I slipped into the Frankenstein dance. I don't know what this involved, and I haven't been able to replicate it for friends. I think I was on the verge of a stroke at that point, I'm not sure. I do know that I wasn't very happy with the way my life was going at that moment. After the first take I was yanked by an irked cameraman. "We 'ad our lit'l chat about those lights, din't we?" Not yet knowing that my favorite shirt had been ripped, I felt some relief. More than 1/800th of a second's exposure was more participation than I wanted. Suddenly Jake Nova parted the crowd, pointing at me. "You... Cowboy Bub!" My smile wilted. "Ay... like... yer... ENAGY! Back in!"

After a second dance of doom, this one with Holly wrapped around my leg, background was allowed backstage. We were greeted by the other end of that lifesaving air conditioning hose I'd seen a few hours earlier. Kelly sat, depressed. I sat, depressed. Scotty's Bodies cheerfully discussed their upcoming "gigs."

Afterwards, waiting for our checks, I made a move for a final fistful of catering cookies. "Actually," the woman of hateful professionalism told me, "those are for crew." We collected our \$125 check and I wrangled an additional 30 from a bald man carrying an impossibly large bankroll, reimbursement for my destroyed cowboy shirt. I did some math. One hundred and twenty-five (pay) plus \$30 (shirt) minus \$8 (parking) minus \$5 (wagering) = \$142. At thirteen hours, that gave me \$10.92/hr, probably union wages in Iowa. So why did I feel dishonored? As if sensing my confusion, a crew member, an American, yelled at me from across the thinning lot. "Holy SHIT dude, I can't wait to see that fuckin' Frankenstein dance!! Man your eyes were rolling back in, your head bro!"

Postscript: I've since seen the video, and my dance has been recorded, although I'm on screen for less than 24 frames. I can also safely say that the video is the crummiest crumb of crap ever to have tumbled from God's ass. Jake Nova and Holly Valance and myself and all of humanity should be deeply embarrassed. Except that I am now pulling my Good Deed card. The Smell made almost three months rent. This one goes down as a positive mark on my permanent record.

Plus, it's only being aired in Europe.



REP
IT
UP

JESSICA
HOPPER

We here in Chicago are amidst a trash strike. Day five of tense, unbudging negotiations between the workers and the haulers. Workers and their families encamped in the parking lots of their employers, signs hoisted, with wood burning in a metal barrel, despite that we're having an 80-degree heatwave in October. So one could assume that the metal-barrel-fire is so ensconced as part of the picket lines of striking workers that you can not really have one without the other.

Last night, I watched a debate between the workers union head and the haulers negotiator on the local PBS affiliate, and the city of Chicago's refuse management ambassador, who had the sort of reactionary and flustered demeanor of a 13-year-old and that one can only assume had managed to become appointed through direct family nepotism. He would raise his eyebrows, but not actually look up off the anchorman roundtable, and say "Hello-o! We are about to have a Rat Invasion here. The trash is piling up guys! With this heat, by Friday, we are going to have a real rat issue here!" and then would sigh through his nose. He has the manner of a man who is clearly being towed asswards through life. I imagined him getting ready for his big appearance on the show, his mother tying his tie and him rolling his eyes and going "Jeez, mom!" every three seconds. He was feeling some real anxiety about the Rat Invasion.

I, on the other hand, could not be looking forward to it more. The fact that in 2003, something as biblical and apocalyptic as hordes of rats descending on the third largest city that not only cannot be stopped but are threatening and scaring the populace—an *animal rise-up* that is beyond any human means to halt—is MIND-BLOWING. MINDBLOWING.

Last night, Nathan and I were out bike riding in the heatwave. When I ride my bike I normally like to sing aloud: "Rudolph the Red Nose Reindeer" (my favorite song—very hooky and memorable), a song that I think is the national anthem of America (it has a line about "Amber Waves of Grain")—but I am not sure because I don't watch sports and went to a Montessori school where we learned like, Russian instead... but I made up a song about the imminent CHICAGO RAT INVASION of 2004. It goes:

RAT INVASION!

RAT INVASION!

RAT INVASION!

We're gonna have a Rat Invasion!

(that's just the chorus, because each verse is made up, which is terribly easy as invasion is rhymed with Asian, persuasion, abrasion etc...)

PBS and NPR told me that with 'this heat' the rats will come and INVADE OUR CITY, because the city trash haulers and the trash truck workers can't settle a strike... Eight days of trash is not a big deal to me, but, alas, I am not a Chinese restaurant with 77 pounds of half eaten egg rolls a-piling up.

The Rat Invasion fascinates me.

I imagine some super signal, perhaps a great fetid stench, is sent out to all rat hovels nationwide and the rats grab their little rat coats, or capes or shoes (think *Secret of Nymh*) and run, run, run full speed—we know they will be here by Friday, which makes me think that they left Monday and are all scurrying to Chicago, under the cloak of night. Stopping only to eat a snack of melted plastic or a sewer-soaked Cheeto. And upon sun up on Friday . . . the whole city is like Willard. Or was it Ben (lets say Ben, because Michael Jackson did that great song for the soundtrack). Just, like, you cannot walk outside the house because rats try and crawl up your pant leg and stuff, rats coming down in parachutes. Tactical forces plotting for maximum trash gnawing.



Beatle John Lennon and an unimpressed waitress, 1974

Having never been one of the richest and most famous pop stars in the history of Western civilization, I can only imagine (doh!) how John Lennon must have felt, having to resort to sticking female sanitary napkins (do they still even have those things, let alone call them that?) on his forehead in an attempt to get the sort of attention he felt he merited.

For those of you not *au courant* with your 1970s rock and roll gossip, the story goes something like this: fed up with Lennon moping around the house, doing too many drugs, and threatening to serenade her with yet more self-indulgent dirges, Yoko Ono sent the one-time "bigger than Jesus" Beatle-boy packing.

Being a shrewd businesswoman and well aware of what side her sushi was battered on, Ono didn't dump him permanently, she just told him to go out to the West Coast for a while and "find himself." (Why such a disproportionate amount of this finding oneself business takes place on the West Coast remains a mystery to me, as does the fact that I have never once heard anyone say, "That's it, I'm off to Nebraska to search for the meaning of life.")

Taking no chances, Ono even picked out a girl to accompany

"Do you know who I am?"

"Yeah, you're some asshole with a Kotex on his forehead."

—Interchange between former

her midlife crisis-having husband, her own personal assistant, one May Pang. Pang's job was to attend to Lennon's "needs," whatever those might be, and to keep him in one piece for whenever Ono decided she wanted him back and/or some new fur coats.

Lennon seems to have been one of those characters who found freedom a bit burdensome, and went on the sort of undignified tear that you'd expect from stockbrokers or frat boys set loose in the big city minus their wives and girlfriends. I saw him in a disco myself, sniffing amyl nitrate and dancing like a spazz. Well, it looked like him, anyway. I can't vouch for my own perceptive abilities at the time.

However, of all the things you might do during a wild night on the town, disappearing into the ladies' bathroom and re-emerging with a Kotex plastered on your forehead has to rank near the bottom of the list. I can honestly say that I've never felt motivated to do likewise. I don't think anyone else I know has, either. So it's possible Lennon may have found a truly unique way of expressing his, um, uniqueness.

But surely he could have just picked up a guitar, or for that matter a kazoo, or started crooning one of his umpteen hits, and the whole place would have been falling at his feet. If he didn't want to resort to such tried and true devices, he could have tried something mildly offbeat like, say, passing out free money, and everyone would have been rushing to be his friend.

So why the Kotex strategy? It seems counterproductive at best. I mean, even if I were some sort of superstar, would you want to hang out with me in a trendy nightclub if the deal included me wearing feminine hygiene items prominently displayed on my forehead? I think not, no matter how desperately you were starved for fame by association.

Even as I was writing this, though, I realized why Lennon felt driven to such unorthodox devices: all the usual ones were too boringly easy and predictable. What's more, the kind of attention gleaned by being a Beatle, even a washed-up former Beatle, would be quite worthless, destructive even, to the person inhabiting the social construct the masses of us knew only as "John Lennon, pop star."

Somewhere in there, presumably, was a real human being, just as vulnerable and needy and insecure, defensive and arrogant as the rest of us, who desperately needed to be recognized, not as a celebrity, but as himself.

At least that's what the shrinks tell us. We all need to be recognized and acknowledged. Not necessarily as being anything special or important; we just need to be told by others that we exist, that they see us and feel us and hear us. It may be, short of mirrors, which always lie (except on those days when we are looking exceptionally good of course), the most reliable way we have of knowing we are here.

I'll admit it sounds a little specious to me. I spend so much time wrapped in my own thoughts and obsessions that it's hard to imagine my not being here. If anything, my problem is remembering that anyone else is. Yet, as I say, the shrinks tell us it's so, there are more of them than of me, and they certainly make a lot more money, so there's probably something to it.

I had ample opportunity to reflect on such metaphysical matters one recent weekend when, for reasons known only to wiser men than myself, I agreed to undertake the modern equivalent of appearing in public with a Kotex on my forehead. I believe it's called spoken word.

Since my retirement from the punk rock record business, I've kept a low profile. I don't get to many shows unless friends of mine are playing; I don't hang out in trendy venues or mingle with the movers and shakers. Occasionally someone will spot me on the street or in a train station and shout, "Hey, I know you! Didn't you used to, um...?"

I know people who are far more famous than I ever managed to be who would be devoutly thankful for that kind of existence, people who find it difficult to run to the corner store or get a cup of coffee without being interrupted and harangued by strangers. The worst I usually had to endure was having demo tapes shoved in my hand while being told, "We sound just like Green Day."

So why would I be willing to stand in front of a group of people who were only there because I'm supposed to be (or to have been) somebody, and talk and answer questions about, well, myself? Well, for starters, it's a bit flattering, especially for a kid who was voted least popular dweeb in his class for several years running during elementary school.

And the first night went pretty well. Really well, in fact. True, most of the kids were so young that they had barely been born when the stuff I was talking about—especially Gilman Street, the East Bay scene, the early Lookout years—was happening, but they were not only attentive, they asked great questions and seemed downright fascinated.

I thought, this is great, I could do this for a living, just go from town to town talking and getting attention and praise, and I don't even have to put up with unruly drummers and bassists or split the money four ways. Even when I realized that most of the kids there hadn't come specifically to see me as opposed to the bands who were also playing that night, I wasn't discouraged.

Then the next night there were no bands, and not many people, either. All right, maybe I was being as unrealistically negative about the second night as I was unrealistically positive about the first night. The fact that anyone is willing not only to come listen to me blather about myself, but actually to pay money for the privilege of doing so, should be nothing short of miraculous. For much of my life I couldn't even amuse myself, let alone a room full (okay, partly full) (okay, a quarter full) of strangers.

But the question remains, why would I want to do it in the first place? And would I do it again? I'll answer the second question first, because it's easier: yes, I would do it again. Which makes it all the harder to answer the first one: why?

It would make sense, perhaps, if I could rake in the kind of money Jello Biafra or Michael Moore do for their rants, but I have neither their talent, their irascibility, nor their ability to speak in sound bites. What's more, I lack their overweening conviction; you don't go listen to a Biafra or Moore lecture for thoughtful introspection, you go for snappy, neatly packaged answers to What's

Wrong With Everything.

But not only did I have no such answers; I didn't even get the questions. I was halfway expecting the Trotskyists or the Neo-Primitive Anarchists or the Down With All White Men Including Ourselves caucus to turn up to argue with me about allegedly controversial things I've said, but either they couldn't be bothered or my opinions haven't ruffled as many feathers as I thought. Which was disappointing in a way, though a relief as well. I really wasn't up for a shouting match.

What did I want then? For a crowd of people to sit there and avidly drink in my pearls of wisdom, interrupting me only occasionally to remind me how brilliant they thought I was? Sure, I suppose that would be all right for a start.

Which is pretty sick, if you think about it. Pathetic, anyway. Validation, reinforcement, even just patient listening, these are the things we're supposed to get from friends and families and loved ones, not from a room full of strangers. It must be the intellectual ego-reinforcement version of being a slut.

And yet there's got to be some value to going out talking to people, sharing experiences, answering some questions and provoking others. It's not only about getting attention, is it?

I keep coming back to that question and coming up with same answer (or lack thereof). I'd like to think that someone or several someones will benefit from hearing about my experiences, my values, my hopes and dreams, but I have no way of knowing if that will ever be true. Even if they applaud wildly and tell me they haven't been so entertained since the circus came to town, it doesn't prove anything; after all, the dopeman and the bartender are never short of friends, and the same band that gives one confused adolescent a reason to live can provide the soundtrack to someone else's suicide.

I don't know. Obviously I can't be responsible for what someone makes of my story, or how they let it affect them, at least not as long as I have tried my utmost to be honest and open about it. I keep thinking back to something former MRR columnist and Yeastie Girlz co-founder Jane Guskin used to say: "One live show is equal to ten rehearsals. Or maybe a hundred."

Most of us spend hours, months, years even, sequestered in the rooms of our imagination, preparing thoughts, ideas, images and attitudes to try out on the "real" world out there. We think of all the clever things we could say, or should have said, or will say if we ever get the chance.

Those are all just rehearsals, though, and we can always convince ourselves we sound good in rehearsal, if only because there's no one there to tell us differently. Putting ourselves on the line in front of another person—or ten thousand people; it's really not that different—is when the show really starts.

So in answer to your next question, yes, I'd love to come to your town and address your punk rock collective or Rotary Club or church group or random concatenation of drunks, outcasts and misfits. Do I have anything worth saying or listening to? No guarantees there, but I'm sure you'll let me know if I don't. ☺

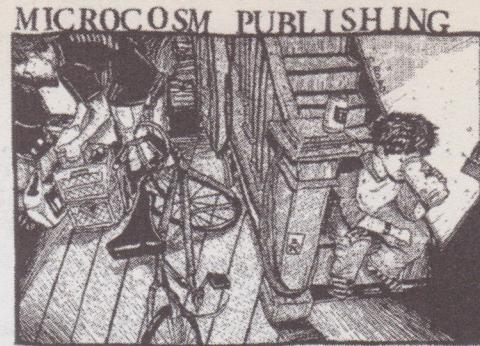
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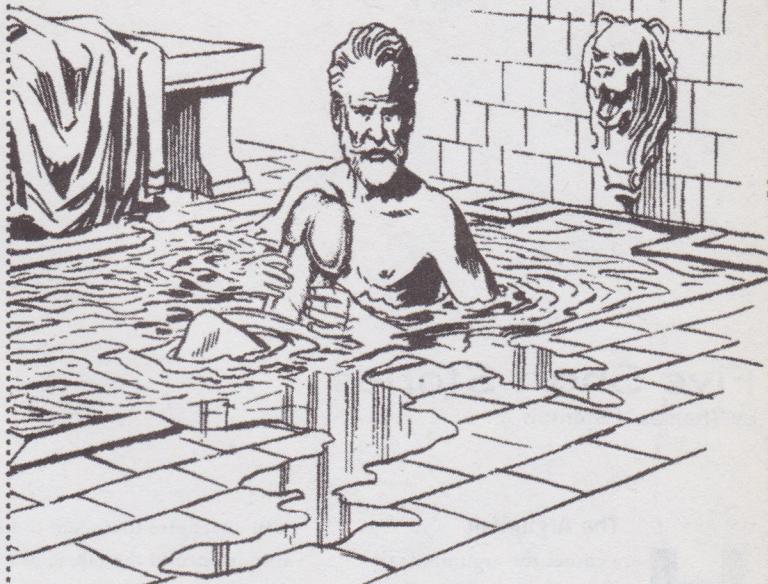
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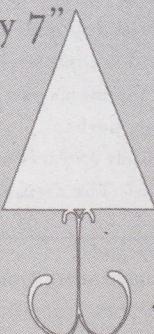
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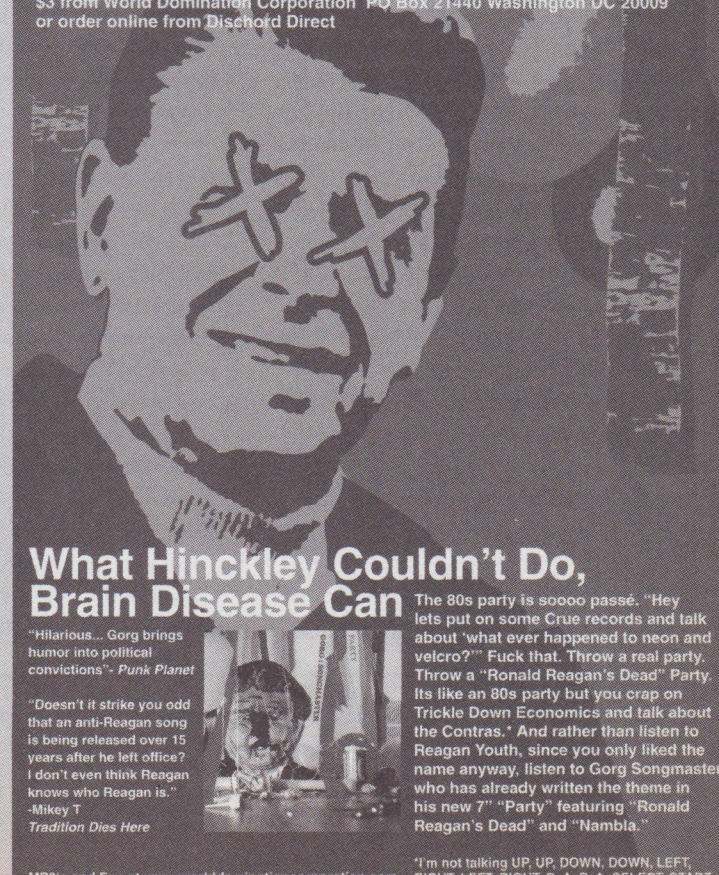
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"I'm not talking UP, UP, DOWN, DOWN, LEFT, RIGHT, LEFT, RIGHT, B, A, B, A, SELECT, START.

Five Short Stories

by Thomas J Stanton

The Argument

Here comes the argument; the one that undeniably and often times abruptly ends with him, the man, saying, "I don't think you understand me, I mean, in a cultural way. I don't think you understand my people or where I come from. I don't think you understand me ethnically, I guess, and I think that often times that lack of understanding is really negatively affecting our relationship. Dare I say, that lack of understanding, if it keeps on augmenting and infesting and so distorting our entire relationship, then it will, eventually, be our total demise, the end of the whole thing maybe."

So she, the woman, goes to the library, the one across the street from the fancy Italian restaurant that she and the man used to go to every Saturday evening, and checks out a stack of books concerning the history of the country that the man's grandparents, and his grandparent's grandparents, have come from. The books are tatty and frayed, but she reads all of them. While he is at work, she memorizes certain names and certain places and cer-

tain anecdotes that seem to be of particular importance to the fabric of his ancestors' long and jagged past. She reads books about the varied geographies and politics of the place that the people that have come before him have sailed away from. About the heroes and about the autocrats, the dictators and the brutish oppressors. She reads about the wars that have riddled his history, the lives lost and lines crossed. She memorizes dates and numbers and often times forgets several of the things that she has previously memorized, because she is so busy memorizing new things.

After she is done reading the books and has returned them, she goes to the record store near their house, and buys the albums of the artists that he, the man, has oftentimes referred to as "his people." She listens to each record over and over and over again. She learns certain dance steps and puts certain lyrics and melodies to memory until her head is completely filled with the things of the man's past, his tribal yore and yesteryear, perhaps.

Our lives are abstrusely and irrevocably tangled with our pasts. The argument

concerning the man's neglected and misunderstood cultural history recurs two weeks later. He, the man, is standing in the bathroom shaving, shirt-sleeved and visibly aggravated, and the woman is lying on their bed. But on this particular evening, after he is done with his personal discourse of sorts, every word particularly chosen and placed, she, the woman, rises from the bed and walks over to him, the man, and says "I do not want you to just suddenly get over the pain that you have been caused by your history, and the fact that it is nearly impossible for me to understand exactly where you have come from and what you are feeling, but sometimes I feel as though both of us are shackled by the same master."

The Ritual

And so they do this on their birthdays. Birthdays, and any other festivity where a pastry is required. It would come as a drunken suggestion, a cake shaped like a man; cake arms and cake legs, and an exaggerated penis made from candy-bar or a frozen banana. And now it is two years

CALL FOR SUBMISSIONS: Keep those submissions coming. Don't forget that our word limit is 1,700. Send your work as a .doc or .rtf file and put your name and e-mail address on the story itself (not just in the e-mail). Send it to: fiction@punkplanet. Thanks! —Leah Ryan

WRITER'S PERSPECTIVE

WRITING PRACTICE: HOW TO GET INTO THIS MESSY BUSINESS

later, and when the photographs come back there is still flat-light and red-eye. The candor of the newcomers and the crudeness of the first bite, teeth against the shaft. The inevitable ogle of the lookers-on. The moment when your nervous laughter becomes a guffaw. The raptural passing of an ephemeral flash, and ever so quickly a part of you goes, with tubes of frosting and a handful of candles. The moment when the unusual becomes the usual. The faces are all mouth, stretched lips and teeth and jutting jaws. The twist of a face in celebration.

The Process

Always start at the beginning. There is a figure shaving, just inside the threshold of the bathroom. If that figure is my cousin, than he is meticulously trimming his teenage moustache for a job interview. If the bathroom he is using is the one in our basement, than it is the same room that I will capriciously lose my virginity in, only a month later. If the razor he is using, does, in fact, belong to my sister, than it is the same one she will use, in an attempt to commit suicide after an argument with our mother, during which a strict curfew has been set and all of her Cure albums

burned. It is my father who finds her, lifeless and splayed across the linoleum floor. He drives her to the hospital, mesmerized with shock. If that hospital is Thompson Memorial, than it is the same dimly lit and death-ridden facility that my grandmother, almost a year earlier, had lost a long and relentless fight with Hodgkin's disease. There is a church directly across the boulevard from the hospital, I can see it while we sit, patiently waiting for my sister to somehow suddenly wake up. If that church is St. Francis Cathedral, than my mother has gone there to pray, just yesterday afternoon. She had slapped her only daughter across the face, and said and done things that she did not mean.

The Phone Calls

He distinctly remembers teasing her about the messages that the boys would still leave, long after the two of them had started dating. Sometimes about the certain tone and strain in the voices of boys, who remained faceless to him. Sometimes about the inside jokes they would tell, broken and scratchy through the used answering machine speaker. The two of them would lie in bed, a tangle of young limbs, and the phone would ring, three

o'clock in the morning. Eleven or 12 at night. Midnight, sometimes. The ghosts of her past. Now, tonight, a little after two a.m., weeks after they have separated, he is imagining another boy teasing her about the message he is about to leave, drunk and disintegrating.

The Mother and Son

The mother is angry because her son has lied again. Her son has skipped class and then made up a well-fabricated excuse; an excuse that the mother, even amidst her emotional turmoil and grief and regret, can see her son has thought very long and hard about. An excuse with a life of its own; coincidences and circular plot lines. The mother sits with her son, outside the school, watching his hands move with such animation and conviction, listening to this stretched lie that she wants so badly to be true. ☺

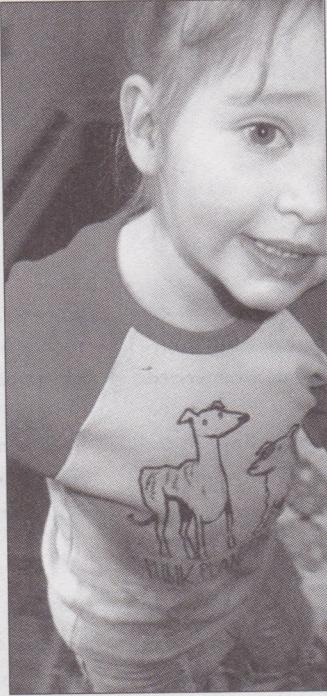
Thomas J. Stanton is a graduate student in the writing program at the University of Southern California. His editorial work had been featured in *Flaunt*, *Anthem*, and *Stop Smiling*. These stories, amongst others, will be included in his first collection, out the summer of 2004. Thomas lives and works in Los Angeles. Direct bullets and flowers toward regularkarate@aol.com.

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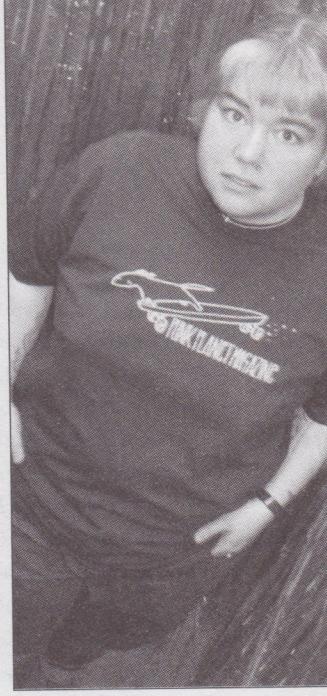
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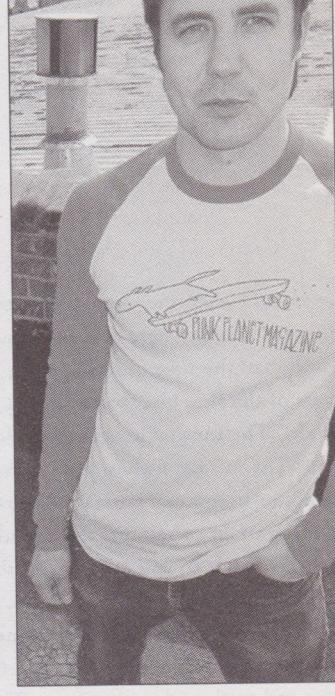
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Astronauts in your Neighborhood

Ten Tips for Real Writing

By Joe Meno

On the south side of Chicago, where I grew up, I didn't know anyone who was a writer. There were construction workers and cops and teachers and housewives and even nuns, but no one that I knew who called themselves a writer. I'm sure they were there—maybe in hiding—but there was no one I could wave to at the end of the old block and say, "There's Mr. Haversham. One day I'd like to be like him. A writer . . ." To me, being a writer was about as likely as flying a rocket into space. It was not going to happen for me.

It seems that for hundreds of years now, the written word has belonged to those who could afford the time and luxury to pursue it: namely, the wealthy, the elite, the white males of the world who, for so long, have ruled much of everything. So the stories, books, and poetry, that are revered as classics today belong to a very small segment of the entire global population.

It's time to fuck shit up on the page; because, finally, things are really beginning to change. With the advent of civil rights reform and better education for the underclass in addition to the unlimited power and immediacy of the Internet and DIY self-publishing, amazing voices are being heard, important stories are getting told, and the distance in how we come to understand other people is shrinking. What do you got to say? Here are 10 tips to get you going.

1. OK, just try writing. Yes, duh, but like anything—painting, playing the trombone, ice-skating—writing is all about the *practice*. The more you do it, the better you get at it. When I first started out, I thought I could *think* myself into being a writer. Like if I got a nice sweater and a scarf and sat in a café drinking coffee and thinking about the amazing shit I was going to write, then somehow, magically, I would be a writer. But writing is something that is *defined* by the act. Like great jazz musicians—my friend, Birdie, for instance, who locks himself in his room for eight hours a day with his horn, but who plays that coronet so good it makes you wonder maybe there is something called love—you have to practice, practice, practice.

2. Think of an audience when you work. Having an audience for what you're writing puts a demand on you as a writer to make it interesting, to tell it thoroughly, and to make it surprising and active. It also makes it worthwhile, like you're not just doing this thing to cramp your hand.

3. Write like you talk. The problem a lot of beginning writers face is that they try to sound like they are "writers." Inspired by Faulkner and Hemmingway, they think their work has to be "literary." Writing is based on the oral form, meaning, before there were pens and paper, people told each other stories. The best contemporary writers do it, using the vernacular of their neighborhoods, families, and jobs. You want to sound like a writer? Put your voice, your lingo, your way of talking on the page.

4. Read stuff! Again, it seems like a no-brainer, but the more you read, the more you figure out about writing. Again, I thought I could

make myself a better writer—without reading. It's like wanting to be the best drummer in the world and only occasionally noticing what other drummers are doing.

5. Don't be afraid to suck it up. In order to write one decent short story, I usually have to write a lot of bad ones. This is the case with anything. Do you know why most band demos aren't available? Because they suck and the bands don't want their fans to have them. We want to pretend we were born excellent. Writing is a process of a lot of trial and error. The more you're trying, the more you'll get it right.

6. Read your work out loud. A great trick to figure out what's working in your stuff is reading it out loud, preferably to a live audience. If you can't round up your boyfriend, and there's no coffee house open mics in your area, read it to yourself out loud. You'll catch typos, repeated words, clichés, bad grammar, and most importantly, the moments when you're unclear or losing the heart of what you're working on. If you're writing a short story about two samurais fighting, and stop to describe a lovely vase for 10 pages, reading it out loud will help you clue in that you need to get back to the sword-slinging.

7. Turn off the TV. *The Simpsons* may be the greatest show of all time, but watching it will not help you get good with the writing. Turn off the TV, pick up the pen, and just start anything.

8. Figure out your best process. Figure out what works for you, in terms of getting down your best writing. At night? In the morning? Do you need to listen to "I Wanna Be Sedated" before you can get going? Do it, but do it *regularly*. Figure out the pattern that best works and do it on a regular, consecutive basis.

9. Think about your life and what you can draw from it to write about. There's a mantra with a lot of writers—*write what you know*—which is only partly true because what you know is also what you can imagine. However, if you've lived a life, survived fucking childhood, you've got plenty of memories, events, dreams, nightmares, and characters to draw from. Most of the best stuff you'll write will be connected pretty strongly to you: what you love, hate, where you've been—the shit you've come through. The more you realize that your life is a great source of material, the more honest, authentic, and meaningful the stuff you do becomes.

10. Don't take yourself so fucking seriously. Writing is no different than painting or playing in a fucking band, but most writers take their shit so seriously—it's not fun or funny. If you wanted to be uptight, be the guy who screws the plutonium into the missile head. The more open, the more risky, the more fun you have, the better your work will be every day. ☺

*Joe Meno is a fiction writer from Chicago. He is the author of two novels, *Tender as Hellfire* and *How the Hula Girl Sings* and is the winner of the 2003 Nelson Algren Award. He is also a professor of creative writing at Columbia College, Chicago.*

DIY sex EARLY TO BED

by sex lady searah

Dear Sex Lady,

I have never told anyone this before, but I am really starting to freak out about something. Lately, I've been having sexual thoughts about my sister. She's 19 and really hot. I am 16 and haven't had sex or anything yet (although I have kissed a few girls). I feel like this is out of control. I don't want to have sexual thoughts about her, but sometimes when I am jerking off, I just can't help it! When my parents are out, she'll sometimes have guys over and they will go into her room and have sex. I can hear her doing it and it really turns me on. Please tell me this is a phase or something. I am so disgusted with myself.

Signed,
Sicko?

Dear Sicko,

Incest, along with bestiality and eating poop, is really one of the few last remaining serious taboos. Butt sex is legal now all over the country, S&M has become fashionable and Golden Showers are popular in "mainstream" porn like Penthouse. But incest—while the occasional fodder for hardcore porn—is still a concept that freaks most people out and for the most part, it should. And let me make clear before I go any further with this question that *any sex that is non-consensual is wrong*. Adults forcing themselves sexually on their kids (or anyone else) is always *unquestionably wrong*. Period. But this question deals with the more murky realm of fantasy and non-abusive incest.

First of all, fantasy is *not* reality and that is a really important thing to remember. It isn't illegal to fantasize about *anything*. I personally fantasize about beating the crap out of asshole drivers when they don't show my bike-riding ass some respect. I know that it is wrong to beat people up, so I don't act on the fantasy. That is how I stay out of jail and the hospital (I can't even beat my little sister in arm wrestling). Anyway, the important thing right now is to realize that this is *just a fantasy*. And it should stay that way—whatever you do, do *not* tell your sister that

you think she is smokin' and that you listen to her boning her boyfriends. That would be really, really bad. And it is a very bad idea to act on this fantasy in any way (like touching your sister inappropriately or trying to kiss her). If you do, then it crosses that very important fantasy/reality line and could make the rest of your life with your family very unhappy (not to mention traumatize your sister).

But let's talk a bit about why you are having these fantasies. You're 16. Your hormones are raging—*really* raging—and you, apparently, don't have much of an outlet for your sexuality. Then here you have a "hot" 19-year-old girl living right under your own roof. You know she is sexually active and you can even hear her "doing it". Being able to hear her having sex would make it pretty hard to avoid thinking about the fact that she is having sex and once you do that, being 16 with raging hormones 'n' all, it seems actually pretty logical that you would get turned on. While most guys don't have sexual feelings towards their sisters, you are not a complete freak for doing so and I am pretty sure that these feelings will pass. Hopefully you will meet a nice girl who isn't related to you and your uncontrollable lust for Sis will fade quickly. However, you might want to consider getting some counseling. I am not saying this because you necessarily need to be "fixed", but I was a teenager once and it sucks. It is great to have someone to talk to about this kind of stuff—someone who can help you figure out exactly why you feel this way. But if you find that you are too into your hot sister to be interested in other girls (or boys) or you find yourself tempted to act on these impulses, then I urge you to get some counseling.

I try to be as non-judgmental as possible about these kind of things and think that there are tons of "unconventional" relationships that work beautifully, but incestual relationships are just no good (and usually involve fucked-up power dynamics). Incest fantasy about your 19-year-old sister? Understandable. Sexual relationship with your 19-year-old sister? Extremely problematic. Got it?

Dear Sex Lady,

Can you tell me what kind of vaginal discharge is good and what is bad? I feel like I have a lot of it and am worried that something is wrong with me (and am too embarrassed to talk to a doctor about this).

Thanks!

Wondering about wet

Dear Wet,

First of all, most vaginal discharge is perfectly normal and healthy. To use a kind of gross metaphor from my favorite sex education website (scarleteen.com), it is kind of like the saliva of your vagina. It is produced to help keep infections at bay and keep your cooter clean and healthy. Women produce vaginal discharge on a daily basis. There can be variations in the amount produced or the way that your discharge appears due to your menstrual cycle, stress level, or medications that you may be taking. Normal discharge should be clear or slightly yellowish and have little or no smell. It can be just a little or kind of a lot. Around the time of your period, it may even be a little brown. Most chicks have yellow stains in their white undies from discharge and that is perfectly normal. Some women use panty liners everyday to prevent this, but I don't usually recommend that because panty liners (with their plastic backings) can prevent air from circulating around your vulva (it's got to breathe to stay healthy). If you notice a change in the way your discharge smells (if it is "fishy" or stronger than usual) or looks (if it is grey, green, or more yellow) or if it has "chunks" in it (I hate that term, but it is very descriptive) go see your doctor. These changes could be a sign of infection.

To keep your girl-parts healthy and clean follow these few simple suggestions:

- Always practice safe sex (condoms, dental dams, gloves) if you have latex allergies, use non-latex condoms & gloves.

- Avoid getting any anal bacteria in your vagina or vulva. Wipe from front to back and never put a toy (or finger or dick) in your

pussy once it has been in your ass

- Avoid eating a lot of sugar & processed foods.
- Let your genitals get some air. Sleep without your panties, wear underwear with a cotton crotch and avoid camel-toe pants.
- Don't douche. Not with Masingil, not with vinegar, and *certainly* not with anything else. Douching can upset the good bacteria balance in your vagina and can actually cause more infections. Don't let our anti-woman, patriarchal society tell you that your pussy smells bad just because it smells like pussy. Deodorant for your cooch is bad too. Fragrances and such can cause irritation & infection.
- Use water-based, glycerin-free lubricants for sex—and use them a lot! The glycerin in many water-based lubes can encourage yeast infections. Oil-based lubes and things like Vaseline prevent air from circulating in your vagina and can encourage infections as well (not to mention that they make latex barriers useless).
- If you experience any pain, serious itching or burning when you pee, *get thee to a doctor*. Those are signs of infections.

That said, if you ever have any questions about what is happening down there, ask your doctor and if your doctor is such an asshole that you don't feel like you can talk to, *get a new one*. Most larger cities have some sort of women's health center where you can talk to someone and not have to feel worried that they are judging you. A lot of these places will work on a sliding scale, so if you don't have insurance (who even does these days) you can still afford to go. Planned Parenthood is also a great place to get a check-up. It makes me so sad that we have created a culture that makes it hard to ask simple sexual health related questions without feeling embarrassed. My hope is that most doctors have heard everything before and will treat any questions in a dignified manner. If they don't then find a new one and make a complaint to your insurance company (if you have one) and write that doctor a mean letter about what an asshole he/she is. ☺

E-mail me at diysex@punkplanet.com. My shop, *Early to Bed*, is at 5232 N. Sheridan in Chicago. We're online at www.early2bed.com.

DIY food

EVERYTHING THAT

Breaking Bread

Once upon a time I cracked my nose on the bottom of a swimming pool. I've lived with my crooked nose without any problems, until recently learning I have a deviated septum because of it. My local omniscient pharmacist told me to quit eating dairy, wheat and oat products to alleviate my seasonal sinus colds. I try to follow those rules but, while they help the sinus thing, I like certain foods too much to give them up.

If I have to give up wheat then that means bread and I'm a bread junkie. There is nothing like a slice of bread, toasted with butter and cinnamon sugar. But it can't be any old bread. It's a gotta be a browned loaf, hard crusted with an airy interior—a loaf that you really have to wrangle with as crumbs fly everywhere. Not the kind that is so soft it sticks to your teeth, but the kind that lends some grains for chewing and has a nutty, slightly sour taste.

While freshly baked bread is an aesthetically pleasing and tasty foodstuff, it's also an involved process: the yeast, the grain, and the liquid must be mixed, proofed, kneaded, proofed, kneaded, formed, and so on. By the time the bread comes out of the oven, you've achieved a *real* sense of accomplishment. It's a long and winding road for an apparently simple combination of flour and water—or so I imagine.

Truth be told, I've never baked bread; it's always seemed too daunting. But I've always wanted to try and, with the heralding of the New Year, now is the time to give it a shot. Just like that serious record shopping pursuit for that original mint pressing of Yes's *Tales from Topographic Oceans*, bread baking is an undertaking of passion and commitment.

Start with the Starter

This is the beginning of a two-part DIY column following the method of bread baking. First, we will cover creating a starter, while in the next column we'll actually bake the bread.

The "bread of life" is really just that: a living thing. It all begins with the starter, which needs to be fed, just like any other living organism. A starter begins as a culture and forms into a starter as it's fed and prodded. It originates with a simple combination of grain and liquid. When flour combines with water anything can happen. You can make paste, or dough to form little ornaments like my Nana still has in her credenza from my kindergarten years. Or you can wait out the flour/water combination and invite bacteria and microorganisms to move in and activate the process from culture to starter. This is a naturally leavened process involving *fermentation*, a chemical reaction that needs to be controlled in order to maintain a proper starter.

Choosing the flour

The first step in making a starter is to choose a grain. All flours are not made equal. There are many grain flours out there, but the essence of bread flour involves wheat, and wheat has many forms. Slowly, we're experiencing a lack of diversity in wheat choices due to farmers choosing the same types of genetic strains for their crops due to their higher harvest yields.

Common wheat makes up 90 percent of America's harvested production. The other 10 percent is durum wheat—almost entirely protein and little starch—which is grown for pasta and its related products.

A general difference in variety is hard v. soft wheat. Hard wheat kernels have a layer of protein that convert to gluten when the flour is mixed with other ingredients. Gluten is the protein formed by the linking of proteins and sugars. Its amount is determined by the total amount of proteins in the flour that creates it. Soft wheat, on the other hand, is usually grown on fields worn down from centuries of farming. As a result, it's most commonly grown on the fields of Europe's centuries-old land, while hard wheat is generally produced in the younger fields of the Americas. Soft wheat produces more of the flavor and is best for pastry, while hard wheat adds the high protein content and accounts for the workability of the dough.

Generally, it's best to use a ratio of hard and soft wheat for bread flour. Any grain flour is usually cut with wheat flour too. For instance, rye flour needs wheat flour in order to create an airier loaf of bread, otherwise the loaf would be too dense.

The two main components of flour are starch and protein. Starch is comprised of gluten, which in its workability creates strand-like structures that help the bread rise. High protein flour yields high gluten content. If you have strong gluten, it makes for rubbery dough that's tough and needs to be mixed longer than weak gluten dough that's sticky and wet and needs less mixing in order to begin fermentation.

Leavening

Here is where the birthing begins. Leavens make dough rise. Leavens can be created naturally through a homemade starter, or by using commercial yeast. In this case, we'll be growing our own starter. Microorganisms that exist in the air and flour will create natural strains of yeast when combined with water. The fermenting of the sugars creates the leaven. Yeast cells convert carbohydrates into equal amounts of alcohol and carbon dioxide, which is the basic fermentation process. When fed, these cells will keep producing and doubling. Essentially, this is the starter necessary to begin the bread-making process. Natural leavening can be done in either a liquid (slurry) or ball state.

Directions for the slurry starter

Theoretically, this is the only time we'll have to grow a starter. As long as it's cared for—fed and maintained—it can live *forever*. Because it's fragile, everything used to make the starter should be cleaned to remove the unwanted bacteria. Generally, the ratio of flour to water is one to one. Many of the books I consulted called for varying amounts of the ratio and it depends on how much starter you'd like to have in the end.

Some bakers incite fermentation by adding potatoes or fruit. Nancy Silverton in her book, *Breads from the La Brea Bakery*, uses grapes. While other bakers disregard this claim declaring there is no proven benefit to adding these ingredients to the starter, it's up to you. If you do decide to use something like this, the ingredients should be organic and washed before using. Follow directions like Silverton's with the grapes:

Wrap about one pound of grapes in cheesecloth.

After mixing a ratio of one-part flour of your choice to one-part lukewarm water, squeeze the grapes over the mixture. Drop the grape package into the mixture and push it to the bottom.

Even if you're not using grapes, or some other exotic ingredient, a one to one ratio of flour to water should be applied. If you decide to use any flour besides unbleached white bread flour, remember to incorporate some of this flour into your grain flour of choice. Here the ratio of flours would one to one as well.

Once the mixture is complete, the container must be covered with a lid or plastic wrap in order to trap the gases that will form. It should be left at room temperature, which again varies with the experts from 60-75 degrees Fahrenheit. It will rest like this for two days.

Day 3: It's time to feed the starter. Take out half of the mixture and replace the amount with the one to one ratio of flour and water. If you have used additional ingredients like grapes, stir the bag around in the mixture. Cover and put back at room temperature.

Day 4: Repeat the process. It may not smell so nice and be sure to remove any visible signs of mold. Replenish what you take out in equal proportions of flour and water.

Check on the culture once a day for the next five days. Again, if any signs of mold appear, promptly remove them—it should be early enough to not damage the mixture. This is the fermenting process.

Day 10: This is the beginning of a regular feeding schedule for the starter, if you plan to continue a regular baking schedule. Remove the bag of fruit if you've decided to use it and throw it away. Transfer the starter to a container that is sealed, but not airtight—this mixture needs some breathing room.

This starter can be used to make bread right now, or you can cover it in a non-airtight container and place it in the refrigerator. Now that you have a living organism in your refrigerator, be sure to label it so unsuspecting housemates don't throw it out.

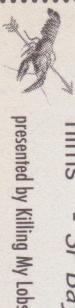
Once you put the starter in the refrigerator, it goes dormant, so you have to plan ahead in order to bake. If the starter hasn't been used in a few weeks, 20 percent of it should be tossed and reactivated by a regular feeding schedule. This removes its conglomeration of acid. If it's been only a week or so, you can just begin the feeding. Reviving the starter and replenishing its volume should bring the starter to life. Let it come to room temperature and feed it—meaning giving it a meal of a one to one ratio of flour and water three times a day until it begins to show signs of life. This is also expanding the starter—don't remove any for the feeding. You will know if the starter is still alive: It should be bubbling and crackling. If it's not, you may have to find the proper feeding it requires for life, or you may have to start over. Feeding of a starter is dependent on its climate. Warmer climates require more feeding. For instance a 75 degree environment may require feeding four times a day, while a 60 degree environment may require only two.

Nancy Silverton offers an alternative to maintaining a starter by drying it:

Pour the starter onto a baking sheet lined with parchment paper. It should be only a thin layer, otherwise use a couple of baking sheets. Let this dry at room temperature until completely dried out, usually about three days. Peel the starter from the sheets. The dried starter can be stored in plastic bags that are sealed. When ready to use, you only need to hydrate the starter in some warm water. Once dissolved, this new starter needs to be fed the one to one ratio just like the refrigerated version. It takes longer for this starter to revive itself. In about five days it will be ready for baking.

You may want to put the starter away for now; in the next column we'll cover the baking process! Or start baking right away with your new starter! Welcome it to the family. Having a starter is a little like having a pet or child. Regulating the feeding schedule in order to maintain the starter is keeping it alive and preparing for our next step. I'm starting a little diary about it in order to monitor the life of the starter for future reference; you may want to do so as well. If any reader wants to share the trials and tribulations of bread baking, we can exchange e-mails. Happy baking and let's be careful out there. ☺

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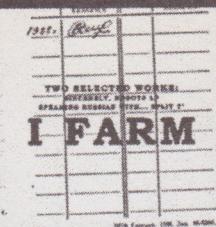
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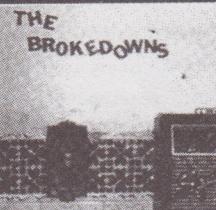
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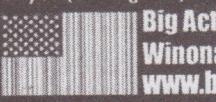
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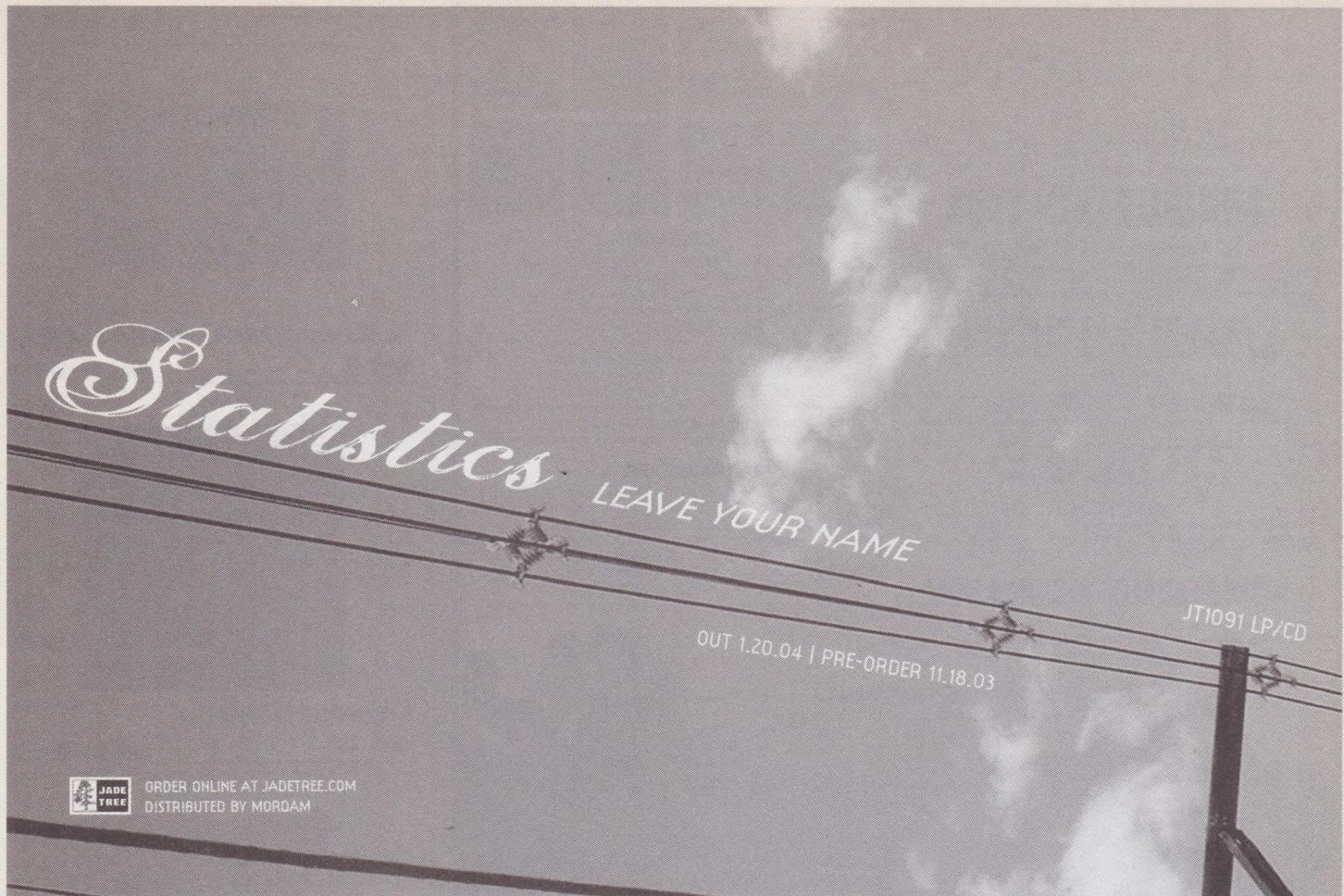
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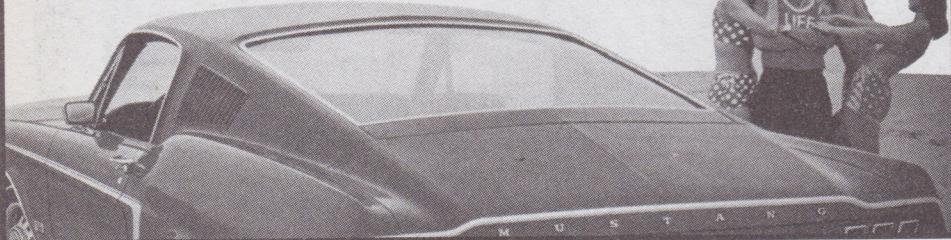
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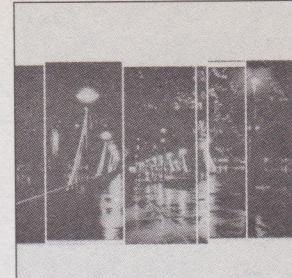
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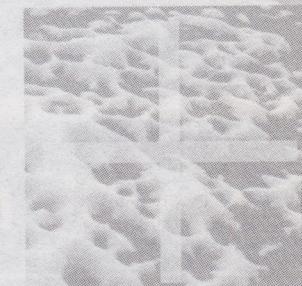
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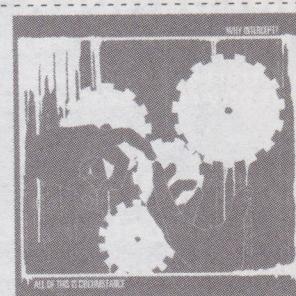
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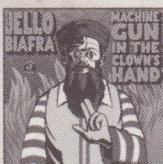
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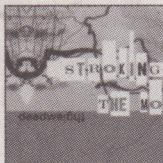


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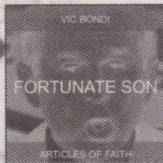
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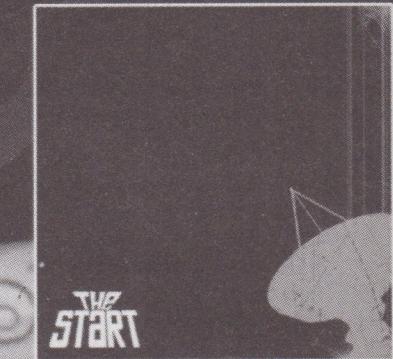
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THIS ISSUE'S REVIEWERS: Eric Anderson (EA), Jay Castaldi (JC), Carla Costa (CC), Brian Czarnik (BC), Art Ettinger (AE), Erica Gallagher (EG), Melissa Geils (MG), Julie Gerstein (JG), Jason Goorder (JG), Dave Hofer (DH), Don Irwin (DI), Ari Joffe (AJ), Tim Kuehl (TK), Dan Laidman (DAL), Sean Moeller (SM), Krystle Miller (KM), Dana Morse (DM), Bart Niedzialkowski (BN), Sonia Pereira (SP), Rex Reason (RR), George Sanchez (GBS), Neal Shah (NS), Dan Sinker (DS) Edited by Kyle Ryan (KR)

A Week In July – *Near Fatal Explosion*, CD

Power pop with post-hardcore sensibilities—harmonies soar while the guitar riffs pummel. The lyrical subject of despondent love gets to be a bummer, though—not 'cause the songs are sad, but because they're so self-defeating and pathetically self-deprecating. (And I'm a big Morrissey fan.) File one for Dashboard Confessional fans. (GBS) Orange Peel Records, Inc., PO Box 15207, Fremont, CA 94539, www.orangepeel.com

Abe Ruthless – *No Nothin' Blues*, CD

Why is someone going to buy four tracks of generic rock 'n' roll (one track is actually a acoustic ballad)? Jeff Dahl's production may get someone to buy it, but don't say I didn't warn you. (EA) Formula 13, PO Box 7385, Tempe, AZ 85281, www.formula13.com

Academy – *Making It Personal*, CDEP

From the cover art of a man in a wheelchair watching kids playing basketball to the morose lyrics, you get the feeling that these are some sad young men. They're from Salem, Ore., and they play despondent emo-pop, with a hostile aggressiveness that elevates it from the emo pack. (AE) Milktree/Orange Peel Records, PO Box 15207, Fremont, CA 94539, www.milktreerecords.com

Actual, The – *Songs On Radio Idaho*, CD

Keen poppy-punk. Really good vocal melodies befit the intelligent lyrics and clever turns-of-phrase. The album could stand to be maybe 10 minute shorter with a couple fewer slower numbers, but all in all it's a very strong pop record. Fans of Alkaline Trio and Get Up Kids would dig this. (JC) Eyeball Records, PO Box 1653, Peter Stuyvesant Station, New York, NY 10009, www.eyeballrecords.com

Ⓐ Aesop Rock – *Bazooka Tooth*, CD

When music critics hear something they don't understand, they usually seem to default to the "this is above my head and therefore amazing" review (Radiohead?). When I first heard Aesop's previous full-length *Labor Days*, I was just beginning to delve into the world of indie hip-hop. Even with my limited knowledge of the scene, I could tell that Aesop Rock was kind of weird, but I also knew that I liked his style. Yeah, his style is awesome, but what the fuck is he talking about? I'm not going to pretend like I know or argue that's it's amazing because it's confusing. With his highly anticipated fifth album, Ace has hipster kids buying his records in droves (along with whatever is cool this week), but I assume that all of them share my confusion.

Other than being fairly confused for most of this album, there's an incredible appearance by El-P and another good one by Mr. Lif on the old-school flavored "11:35." (DH)

Definitive Jux, 199 Lafayette St, Suite 3B, New York, NY 10012, www.definitivejux.net

Afflictions, The – *Janet Style*, CD

Pretty hot party rock from this Chicago-based blues/punk combo. Fun and funky songs to make you shake it till you break it. The Farfisa, sax and singing bring me fond memories of the Tar Babies. For a more contemporary comparison, imagine if The Delta 72 weren't hipster asshole drug addicts. (JC)

Trophy Buck Records, PO Box 81117, Chicago, IL 60681, www.trophybuck.biz

Agitators, The – *Meeting The Lads*, CD

Belgian punks singing punk rawk tunes with British accents. In addition to the accents these boys have a sound very comparable to British-style punk. Not bad by any means, but it's not memorable either. (KM)

Street Anthem Records, 6201 15th Ave. NW #B306, Seattle, WA 98107-2382, www.streetanthemrecords.com

A.K.A.s, The – *White Doves & Smoking Guns*, CD

Decent guitar-driven rock, sort of like RFTC but with keyboards instead of a horn section. Pretty cool socio-political lyrical themes, but the singing really bothers me. It's the same half-sung, half-rapped vocal delivery in every song, which for some reason makes me think of Faith No More. (JC) Fueled By Ramen, PO Box 12563, Gainesville, FL 32604, www.fueledbyramen.com

Ⓐ Alias – *Muted*, CD

Alias, of the hip-hop collective Anticon, provides us a collection of tunes based more on quality than on his confident flow over his own music. Using programmed beats and some live instrumentation (keys, guitar) instead of looping heavy beats, Alias proves that he can be quite the DJ. Even though some tracks tend to be somewhat melancholy, there still remain elements that will get the heads nodding. Being a fan of his previous effort, *Other Side Of The Looking Glass*, I am quite surprised at this one's quality, which could be compared to DJ Shadow or Aphex Twin. Quality. By the way, DIY hip hop is punk as fuck, so don't forget it. (DM)

Anticon, www.anticon.com

All Out War – *Condemned To Suffer*, CD

Jumping between metal and hardcore, AOW redefines crossover. It's hard to say which genre is more dominant, because the lyrics are all

politically aware hardcore-style, but the music is mostly metal as hell. This release should easily please fans of both genres. (TK)

Victory Records, 346 N. Justine St. Suite 504, Chicago IL 60607, www.victoryrecords.com

American Tourists – *'80s Gone Mainstream*, 7"

German punk, sung half in English, the other in their native tongues. Kind of frantic screamo stuff, but a lot more controlled with a heavy, at times melodic, sound. (The bass lines occasionally sound like some Bay Area bands.) Decent stuff with serious lyrics and a sense of humor. (DM)

Zeitstrafe, Postfach 28 22 24518, Neumünster, Germany, www.zeitstrafe.de

Ⓐ An Albatross – *We Are The Lazer Viking*, CDEP

If you haven't heard of this maniacal rock 'n' roll atrocity before, let me point out a couple of things. First, I mean "atrocity" in the best way (like a totally fucked up, booze-induced carnival haze). Second, this is screamo. Not like "ugh, screamo/emo core/blahblahblah is so stale, and totally over with as of last year when the Blood Brothers sold out." It's screamy, grindy r'n'r insanity with synths and just a teeny bit of "emotive" appeal. An Albatross is like the Locust's fucked-up/ADD/pyromaniac little brother. They add whimsical, carnie bleeps and bloopers and weird, noisy accoutrements to their grinding guitar blasts, and the singer belts it out with a rock 'n' roll swagger, as if Mick Jagger were born 40 years too late and ended up in a circus horror-show of punk-rock mayhem. Anyway, this band just wants to dance, writhe around on the floor and fuck shit up. Don't you? (MG)

Ace Fu Records, PO Box 552, New York, NY 10009, www.acefu.com

Anamude – *Urban Comfort*, CDEP

Mellow folk rock that's surprisingly not annoying. Pleasant female vocals over talented acoustic guitar. It almost sounds like she's going to break into "Classical Gas" at any minute. And at times her voice reminds me of Shelley Duvall in *Popeye*. That's a compliment. Really. (NS)

Self-released, www.anamude.com

Ⓐ Anchormen, The – *Nation Of Interns*, CDEP

It's so reassuring to know that I'm not the only geeky punk in the world. Hell, I actually feel like an ant in the Anchormen's shadow of geekiness. They play upbeat, sloppy punk that isn't easily categorized and never gets too goofy or pretentious. Not only are they geeky looking and geeky smart, but geeky poetic as well: "We've lost ourselves in the language of the Left/ We've got to learn a new tongue if we want to be heard by the deaf/ Without collective memory we won't last." That was taken from the song "Unsung Heroes" about the labor orga-



nizers and anarchists left out of history books. These guys also belong to a musical collective called Handstand Command for Somerville singer-songwriters. Geeks everywhere unite in support. (TK)
Unstoppable Records, PO Box 440422, Somerville, MA 02214-0006, www.unstoppablerecords.com

Ancient Justice / Ottomen - split, 7"

The Ottomen generate an overzealous brand of poppy garage rock. Ancient Justice spews ugly guitar ballads set off by asinine vocals and exaggeratedly poor production. (EG)
Beard Records, 394 15th St., #1RR, Brooklyn, NY 11215

And The Saga Continues - You Can't Stop The Third, CD

With 18 songs in about 12 minutes, this is blistering, old-school hardcore like Negative Approach or Straight Ahead. Lyrics deal with beer, bullshit and being pissed off. If this was a 7" and it were 1984, maybe I'd be more stoked. But the songs just go by too fast with little memorable remaining. (NS)

Contempt For Humanity, PO Box 463 Station C, Montreal, Quebec H2L 4K4

Answer, The - S/T, 7"

By-the-numbers straightedge hardcore. This isn't necessarily a bad thing, though, as there are lots of fancy bands out there trying much too hard. It's good to hear three chords and two tempos every once and a while. (DH)
Excursion Records, PO Box 20224 Seattle, WA 98102

Apparat - Duplex, CD

Berlin-based Apparat's *Duplex* is 13 idyllic chill-out grooves. Here, he tinkers with all sorts of electronics coupled with organic sounds of acoustic instruments. Despite Apparat's unabashed appetite for experimenting with electronic sounds, *Duplex* is easy to get lost in, with its warmth and smoothness. (EG)

Regenerate Industries, 4060 Boul. St. Laurent, Suite 602b, Montreal Quebec H2W 1Y9, Canada, www.shitkatapult.com

Arkitekchur - The Drawing Boarded Colour Target Future War, CD

Make sure you're prepared for this album before you listen to it. I had to replace my AA batteries after two chords got the shit played out of them for what seemed like a work week. I missed three meals waiting for something to happen. Five tracks and no action: Only a deer hunter would keep on keepin' on.

Tbtmo Records, PO Box 63619, Philadelphia, PA 19147, www.tbtmo.com

Army Of Ponch - Vs. The Curse, CDEP

Melodic emo-core punk rock, very typical of the Gainesville/No Idea scene. The songs are midpaced, but driving and intense. And they do that whole "slow, long and winding guitar buildup into a melodic outpouring of emotion" thing that the emo kids love so much. Well done. (MG)

Sabot Productions, PO Box 28, Gainesville, FL 32602

Arthur, Che - All Of Your Tomorrows Were Decided Today, CD

A rocking solo project featuring the enigmatic Atombombpocketknife member playing every instrument, save for the drums. The music is earnest, the writing moving, and the performance perfectly encapsulates the best of indie-rock tendencies. If you ever thought Shiner could use some introspective writing, this is for you. (BN)

Flameshovel Records, 1658 N. Milwaukee, #276 Chicago, IL 60647, www.flameshovel.com

Artless - Plugged, CD

Longtime MRR pervert and insane columnist Mykel Board has put out a disc spanning his hard core's band entire career. Featuring 27 angry and funny tunes from the '80s and '90s, it's a must have for anyone who walks around pissed off at the mainstream. (BC)

The Only Label In The World, PO Box 137, Prince St. Station, New York, NY 10012

Ashley Park - Secretariat Motor Hotel, CD

Laid back, folksy, country-fied Americana. Make sense? No? This is drowsy, mostly slowly paced pop with a definite '60s feel. Not bad, but nothing jumps out at me. Maybe that's the point. This is the type of record you'd play as you spend a Sunday reading on your sofa. (KR)

Happy Happy Birthday To Me Records, PO Box 1035, Panama City, FL 32402, www.hhbtm.com

Assistant, The - We'll Make The Roads By Walking, CD

Claustrophobic technical hardcore. Meaty production lends itself well to this interesting band, as do the song explanations that help out a lot when listening to an 8:35 song. Screamy, intelligent and very raw, but unfortunately their last album. A spectacular swan song. (DH)

Alone Records, PO Box 3019 Oswego, NY 13126, www.alonerecords.com

Asterisk* - Dogma, CD

Agitation is a fine inspiration. Through 40 songs, Asterisk* replicate everything The Locust do, but at least you can understand the occasional Locust lyric. Relying on grunts and muddy maybe-words, this group shows how to get the spawn of Satan through his or her early language-development stages. (SM)

Three One G, PO Box 178262, San Diego, CA 92177, www.threeoneg.com

At The Spine - The Curriculum Is Never Neutral, CD

At The Spine leader Mike Toschi is an accomplished proletariat singer-songwriter with a strong affinity for Mudhoney and Thin Lizzy. Toschi, who plays all the instruments on the album (except for drums, handled by Aaron A. Semer), writes music that's heavy without being overly aggressive or loud. This is definitely an autumn record: somber, sober, but not depressing. It's refreshing to hear a band that doesn't have to rely on straight 4/4 tempos to get their point across. Hard folk tunes played in 6/8 time like "Cutter" and "Mott Haven" are just as effective as groovy rockers like "Crystal Clear." The production, also done by Toschi, is on point all the time. His songwriting is strong enough that these tunes would probably work with just his clear, clean vocals and an acoustic guitar, but Toschi knows exactly the right studio tricks to beef 'em up without stepping all over the basic song. He doubles up all the vocal tracks, makes the right electric guitar vs. acoustic choices and doesn't extend the tunes beyond their necessary length. This is honestly one of the best records, front to back, that I've heard all year. (AJ)

Global Seepj Records, 1907 11th Ave., East Seattle, WA 98102, www.globalseepj.org

A BOUT OUR REVIEWS: We make every attempt to review all the records we receive (CDs, CDRs and vinyl only--so long as they come from a label that isn't owned/partially owned by a major label), but we reserve the right not to review something we feel isn't appropriate for *Punk Planet*. Also, due to the volume we receive, some records fall through the cracks. Feel free to send us your record(s) for review (4229 N. Honore St., Chicago IL 60613), but expect up to a five-month lag time for it to appear in the magazine. So send stuff EARLY, and include any and all contact information. CDRs that aren't advance promo copies from labels end up in our demo section. All reissues are also in their own section. Records marked with a little ear (♂) are "highlighted" reviews, which means reviewers found them especially noteworthy (not necessarily good or bad). Finally, please keep in mind that if you send us your record, we might not like it. The review is merely one person's opinion, written without God's endorsement. Any questions or concerns can be directed to Kyle Ryan at reviews@punkplanet.com. Please DO NOT CALL the office, as Kyle is not there full-time. Thanks!

**ATBL – Black Lava, CD**

An English-accented band from Rhode Island who has an '80s feel to its dark, synth-rock style. At times they also seem to add in this harder hardcore-type sound (probably a law for all East Coast bands). A nice and interesting marriage at times. (BC)

Sound Virus, PO Box 55703, Valencia, CA 91305, www.sound-virus.com

Atmosphere – Seven's Travels, CD

Hip-hop that actually sounds like it's supposed to. Slug, the MC, has a hyped up, urgent style that displays a firm grasp of witty word play and insightful cultural observation. Lots of bluesy guitar loops, funky bass lines and chopped up soul samples layered over traditional break-beats. Definitely worth checking out. (AJ)

Epitaph, 2798 Sunset Blvd., Los Angeles, CA 90026, www.epitaph.com

Atomiks, The – Motordeath, CD

Garages are for cars, right? It makes perfect sense then that automobile imagery runs throughout the garage-abilly The Atomiks play. There's lots of reverb-saturated guitar, standup bass and spare drumming, but they mostly avoid the retro-for-retro's-sake traps. (RR)

Slovenly Recordings, PO Box 204, Reno, NV 89504, www.slovenly.com

August Premier – Fireworks And Alcohol, CD

Another melodic pop-punk band that can't see past its own navel, kind of like Gameface. (GBS)

Fueled By Ramen, PO Box 12563, Gainesville, FL 32604, www.fueledbyramen.com

Avenged Sevenfold – Waking The Fallen, CD

A combo platter of melodic death metal and opera metal. Maybe they're part of some Swedish Metal exchange program. Sometimes they have the husky, death-metal vocals going on, and other times the vocals are sung a little more triumphantly. Quick beats, soaring guitars and an interesting style. (NS)

Hopeless Records, PO Box 7495, Van Nuys, CA 91409, www.hopelessrecords.com

Banned, The – Imitating Art, CD

The Banned play rock-influenced hardcore punk (or vice versa) with nice melodies sprinkled here and there. The sound is suspiciously familiar, but lucky for them I can't place it. These guys aren't treading any new ground, but this is still catchy and enjoyable. (KM)

Self-released, PO Box 2517, Peter Stuyvesant Station, New York, NY 10009

Bear Vs. Shark – Right Now, You're In The Best Of Hands. And If**Something Isn't Quite Right, Your Doctor Will Know In A Hurry, CD**

Indie rock with a lot of energy. The songs have multiple sections, almost different movements, like in a classical sense. The intricate arrangements and strong execution keep it semi-interesting. (AJ)

Equal Vision Records, PO Box 14, Hudson, NY 12534, www.equalvision.com

Bedroom Walls – I Saw You Coming Back To Me, CD

"Romanticore"—that's the term Bedroom Walls uses to define its sleepy sound. And you know, the label works. Romanticore is exactly what I Saw You is all about: holding your head too long, drinking glasses of Merlot and unraveling your life until you're nothing but a funny pile of socks. The songs

are a little mixed up too, but not in a bad way. Sometimes Adam Goldman, Mr. Sensitivo himself, belts it out. Sometimes a sweet-sounding lady (Ms. Thorne, I believe) croons into the window (I imagine). Sometimes there's no vox at all. Just pleasant, desperately miserable tunes. Awwright! (SP)

Giant Pets Records, 340 Vista Place, Los Angeles, CA 90042, www.bedroomwalls.com

Beneath The Ashes – Nailed To Your Ruins, CD

Nine roaring tracks filled with double kick drums, metal guitar riffs and, at times, slowing with melodic interludes. They win my vote for best song title this issue with "Thank Heavens When Someone Is Crazy Enough To Give Me A Daisy," even though the lyrics have nothing to do with that. (TK)

State of Grace Records, PO Box 8345, Berkeley, CA 94707, www.stateofgrace.com

Between The Buried And Me – The Silent Circus, CD

I'm becoming convinced that the "Sophomore Curse" is a myth. If anything, it's the first record that gives a band an idea of what they want to become and the second that puts their hard work on display. Such is the case with Between The Buried And Me. Making waves in the hardcore and metal scenes since the release of last year's self-titled effort, they've since come into their own as a steamroller of riffs and technical one-uppage. Vocalist Tommy Rogers has an enviable range, and it's a miracle that he can keep up with the insane songs written by the rest of the band. Once again, though, Between The Buried And Me incorporate some actual singing into the mix to break up the assault on your ears, but it's unnecessary. The only concern I have is that the band will use up all of its good ideas and experience a "Junior Curse." Good luck, guys. (DH)

Victory Records, 346 N. Justine St. Suite 504, Chicago, IL 60607, www.victoryrecords.com

Between The Lines – Wake Up Call, 12"

Highly charged hardcore punk from Belgium sung—rather, screamed—in English. The songs, which deal with both social and personal problems, come fast and furious. Those who like their hardcore traditional will eat this up. (BN)

RocknRollRadio, Oosthamsesteenweg 129, 3581 Beverlo-Beringen, Belgium

Bicycle Day – Grade School Weaponry, CD

Fun, energetic pop-rock from an Illinois band now residing in Wisconsin. The vocals (male and female) are loose, tough and quirky. The music consists of enthusiastic guitars and equally vibrant rhythms. Stand-out songs include "High Five For Sonic Force" and "The Apple Barn." An indie band that's done good. (SP)

Self-released, www.bicycleday.com

Big City Rock – S/T, CD

Driven by infectious keyboards and showcasing a definite infatuation with pop, Big City Rock delivers yet another masterful release that dares to stretch, and even break, the boundaries that define rock and pop music. You'll be hearing this on the radio soon enough. (BN)

Self-released, www.bigcityrock.net

Big Star – Story, CD

I was surprised but delighted to find this in my box of records to review. Formed in Memphis in 1971, Big Star helped to create the

power-pop genre as we know it today, inspiring countless bands ever since (Cheap Trick, The Replacements, The Posies and Teenage Fanclub to name but a few). Big Star is one of the most crucial pop-rock bands of the past 30 years, and *Big Star Story* is a great introduction for anybody who wants to go beyond the theme to *That '70s Show*. Yes, "In The Street" is here, along with "September Gurls" and 16 other classics from #1 Record, Radio City and the overlooked *Third/Sister Lovers*. It might be too wimpy for some readers, but this really is some classic and essential stuff that any pop fan should revere. (JC)

Rykodisc, 30 Irving Place, Third Floor, New York, NY 10003, www.rykodisc.com

Blacks, The – S/T, 7"

Fucking perfect, another great r&b-meets-punk band I'm hearing and loving after they've broken up (fuck you too, Oblivians). This posthumous release drips coital sweat and moves like the best R&B. And, it's loud and rude like the best rock 'n' roll. (RR)

Zaxon Virile Action, 45-A Adélaïde, Sorel-Tracy, QC, J3P 1W3, Canada

Bled, The – Pass The Flask, CD

The frontman for hardcore/metal outfit The Bled generates images of blood, intoxication, infatuation and death, screamo-style throughout *Pass The Flask*. Thankfully, he does that more than sing. The question: Is there room for another five angst-ridden gents whose talents hinge on the graphic lyrics/predictable metal riffs formula? (EG)

Fiddler, 8023 Beverly Blvd., #5, PO Box 440, Los Angeles, CA 90048-4523, www.fiddlerrecords.com

Blitzkid – Let Flowers Die, CD

Melodic, Danzig-era Misfits worship. Silly songs about the dead, burning souls and ghoulish creatures of the night, but damn if the melodies aren't tight. Serious crooning of cartoonish lyrics that AFI seems to have mastered. They kind of remind me of the Independents. (GBS)

Antidote Records, 9830 W. 53rd Place, Arvada, CO 80002, www.antidoterecords.net

Blood Has Been Shed – Spirals, CD

Yet another metal/hardcore hybrid to add to your collection of dusty Coalesce and Indecision records. This band is all over the place: slams of metal noise, blastbeats, chugs, tribal experimentations and a couple of slower, more melodic songs (which are the highlights of the album, though slightly Soundgarden-ish in nature). (MG)

Ferret Music, 167 Wayne St. #409, Jersey City, NJ 07302, www.ferretstyle.com

Blood In/Blood Out – No One Conquers Who Doesn't Fight, CD

Typical tough-guy hardcore with your requisite circle pit/kickboxing parts. There are, however, some sweet solo-type guitar licks that really appeal to this metal lover. Not bad. I think these guys are about one or two releases from jumping ahead of the pack. (DH)

Spook City Records, PO Box 34891 Philadelphia, PA 19101, www.spookcityusa.com

Blue Monday – What's Done Is Done, CD

With a name like Blue Monday, I surely didn't guess this was a pissed-off hardcore band. These dudes play crunchy hardcore with shouted vocals and some occasional double-bass-drum attacks. Heavy on the guitars, gang vocals and edge lyrics. Light on the awesome. (KM)

Stab And Kill Records, PO Box 52084, Boston, MA 02205, www.stabandkill.com

Reviewer Spotlight: Amy Adoyzie(AA)

THE CURE, *Galore*. My earliest exposure to Robert Smith & Co. was soured by its association with the pale-faced, patchouli-stinkin' Goth kids at my high school. Now, at the ineffectual age of 23, I have finally relented to The Cure by way of their deliciously joyful compilation, *Galore*, which chronicles their singles from 1987-1997 alongside a previously unreleased track. Look, I know singles comps are mostly fluff and no substance, seldom do they really delve into the depths of the musicians' true artistry. But sometimes "artistry" can blow ass when measured up against fluff so sweet it will make your ears ooze cotton candy. And goddamn, if I ain't oozin' when this record is playing. From the deliriously ecstatic opening track, ("Why Can't I Be You?") we're reintroduced Robert's distinct wailing and all of their deservedly popular hits. I dare anyone with a pulse to push play on this record and tell me that her heart didn't beat with a little extra *umph*. Its moodiness exudes heart-wrenching devotion ("Just Like Heaven," "Lovesong," "Pictures Of You"), playful attitude ("Never Enough," "Friday I'm In Love," "Strange Attraction"), intricate composition ("Hot Hot Hot" "The 13th" "Gone!"), just plain ol' exuberance ("Mint Car") and their synthed-out unreleased track "Wrong Number." Hot Hot Heat can keep their hipster haircuts, because I'd rather have smeared lipstick and Aquanet any day.

Make-Out Mix Tape Must-Haves: Songs: Ohia "Captain Badass," The Cure "Just Like Heaven," Jawbreaker "Jinx Removing," Andrew W.K. "Make Sex" and The Insecures "You, Me, Fuck."

Blue Sky Goodbye – Look On The Bright Side, CD

After listening to this several times and studying the layout, pictures and lyrics, BSB sounds someplace between Down By Law and Bluetip. They're not quite ready for radio, but really close. Maybe they just need some production help from Andy Wallace? It's hard to stop listening. (DH)
Uprising Records, PO Box 480 Laguna Beach, CA 92652, www.uprisingrecords.com

Blue Sky Mile – S/T, CDEP

Poppy, hook-driven tunes that narrowly make an attempt to sound original by adding small, layered guitar riffs throughout the EP. The rest sounds like any other emo-pop band with lyrics about girls and such. (TK)
OHEV Records, PO Box 772121, Coral Springs, FL 33077, www.ohevrecords.com

Brandtson / Camber / Seven Storey – split, CD

A three-way split of Deep Elm's well-knowns. The only songs worth listening to are the three Camber songs. Camber is one of the bands that introduced me to the "emo" genre in the mid '90s, and they haven't changed much since *Beautiful Charade*. They still play great, heartfelt music. (TK)
Deep Elm Records, PO Box 36939, Charlotte, NC 28236, www.deepelm.com

Branko – S/T, 7"

This kick-ass instrumental trio with one foot in spycore a la 007 and one in original surf rock can't be missed (check out the bongo action). This obscure 7" is probably had to find because it's a Swedish import, but if you're up for a good record hunt, this is worth it. (EG)
Black JuJu, c/o Gunnarsson, Platengatan 5B, 582 20 Linkoping, Sweden,
<http://www.blackjuju.com>

Brazelton / Naphtali – What Is It Like To Be A Bat?, CD

This is what severe mental illness must sound like. (That's actually praise.) Traditional rock instruments are played, processed, manipulated and sampled back in a swirling, avant-who-fucking-knows-what-genre storm of music. Over it all the four-octave voices of Kitty Brazelton and Dafna Naphtali float and surge in and out. (RR)
Tzadik, 61 East Eighth Street, New York, NY 10003, www.tzadik.com

Bright Calm Blue – A Direct Approach For Casual Conversation, CD

It's uncanny how much this band has matured since their last release. Throwing caution to the wind, they introduce chaotic discord to their post-hardcore sound, creating a whole new beast. With layered vocals, frenzied guitars, meticulous drumming and sparse keyboards, this may just be the next big thing. (BN)
Level Plane, PO Box 4329, Philadelphia, PA 19118, www.level-plane.com

Broken Bottles – Not Pretty, CD

Featuring lots of *chunka chunka* guitar, a singer who sounds like he should be fronting a bad emo band and uncreative lyrics, this band seems to embody every punk-rock stereotype. (JG)
Finger Records, 2931 W. Central Ave., Unit D, Santa Ana, CA, 92704, www.fingerrecords.com

Broken Heroes / Weekend Warriors, The – Beer Guts And Drunk Sluts, CD

Two street punk up-and-comers get together to swill, snarl and yell their way through this recording. Both of these acts are clearly influenced by

the old-school street sound and pay homage to the bands of yesteryear. Strong stuff from bands that are just coming into their own. (BN)
Street Anthem Records, 15th Ave. NW #8306, Seattle, WA 98107, www.streetanthem-records.com

∅ Bronx, The – S/T, CD

From the rad vampire-esque artwork on the cover displaying the band name in blood on a chin, to the removable stencil inside the insert displaying the band name, packaging is a definite strong point for The Bronx. That's not where it ends, though. The Bronx somehow take the best aspects of fast garage to melodic hardcore. A handful of bands come to mind while listening: The Hives, Avail, Zeke and Refused, mixed in with solid undertones of '80s hardcore, if you can imagine it. For most bands, this would spell doom, but The Bronx walks away sounding original-as hell. I'd be lying if I said I didn't think they rock harder than most bands playing today. (TK)
White Drugs, 7095 Hollywood Blvd #651, Los Angeles, CA 90028, www.whitedrugs.com

Built Upon Frustration – Resurrection, CD

Mosh hardcore with metal overtones. Songs about strength and vengeance and pain, chugging guitars, tough and rough and heavy. (MG)
Da' Core Records, 44077 Bowes Ave., West Mifflin, PA 15122, www.da-core.com

∅ Burnt By The Sun – The Perfect Is The Enemy Of The Good, CD

Picture an untouched beach. Now picture an incredibly technical metal band named Human Remains spoiling this beauty by stomping all over it. This terrible metaphor is the best I can describe how Human Remains affected hardcore and metal music in the 1990s. Although underappreciated by most, their influence spawned numerous (bad) imitators, so the rhythm section from Human Remains has strapped on their boots again. With the loss of a guitar player, Burnt By The Sun's lone guitarist has stepped up with the oft-referenced "fretboard gymnastics." Dave Witte once again shows why he's the fucking man and deserves far more recognition for his abilities as a metal drummer, Mike Olander keeps it pissed on the vocals, and Ted Patterson makes me rue the day he left Human Remains. This album will most likely be the sleeper metal hit in the latter half of 2003. A brutal and interesting listen. (DH)
Relapse Records, PO Box 2060, Upper Darby PA 19082, www.relapse.com

∅ Buttless Chaps, The – Love This Time, CD

Wow. Considering this band's cheeky name, I assumed they were going to be silly but unexciting. Boy, was I wrong. The Buttless Chaps are a group of lads who create spacious songs that travel all over the damn place. They've got alt-country, rock and a semi-electronica-psychedelic vibe happening, and they know how to make it work. The lead vocalist has a voice from heaven: strong and deep. I couldn't help being reminded of The Crash Test Dummies (though it's not *that* deep). Lovelies include "Lonely Hearts" and "Brotherhood," though really the whole album is a pleasant adventure. Nice, boys! (SP)
Mint Records, PO Box 3613, Vancouver, BC V6B 3Y6, Canada, www.mintrecs.com

Caesura – Wallpaper The Witness, 12"

Gritty post-punk comparable to Big Black at times and Mission Of Burma

at others. A tight three-piece featuring throbby bass lines, chicken-scratch guitars and jazzy beats. There's something about three-piece bands that makes each instrument stand out. Not as engaging as I remember them being live, but a pretty good album. (NS)
Birds Go South, 43 Linda St., San Francisco, CA 94110

Calico System – The Duplicated Memory, CD

Is there no end to the self-described hardcore/metal/emo bands? Calico System are more of what you've grown to expect from such things: sing/scream vocals, driving drums and urgent guitar that builds into half-step, melodic breaks. Decent song structure and good production, but completely predictable. (CC)
Eulogy Recordings, PO Box 24915, Ft. Lauderdale, FL 33307, www.eulogyrecordings.com

Capital Scum – Freakshow, 7"

Old-school hardcore punks out of Belgium bust out with seven short and simple growling thrashers. Loud, crunchy and low-pitched songs perfect for a circle pit. My favorite track: "Mr. Alcohol": "You make me feel great/ You make me stay up late/ Die liquid demon die". Grrrr! (MG)
Rocknroll Radio, Oosthamsesteenweg 129, 3581 Beverlo-Beringen, Belgium, www.rocknrollradio.org

Cansecos, The – S/T, CD

The live instrumentation and pop melodies of The Cansecos make their quirky dance music so accessible. But the backbeat is sometimes too synthetic, especially considering the duo's winning quality is their handle on organic elements. A new computer with *Pro Tools* and they'll no doubt create a stellar, plastic-pop dance record. (CC)
Upper Class Records, www.upperclass.org

Capture The Flag – Start From Scratch, CD

These dudes remind me of a band from that VH1 show, *Bands On The Run*. It's not a "turn that shit off, or I'm leaving the room!" record, but their combination of '80s glam metal and punk isn't the type of thing I'd wanna hear more than once. (AJ)
Go Kart Records, PO Box 20, Prince Street Station, New York, NY 10012, www.gokartrecords.com

∅ Casket Lottery, The – Possibilities And Maybes, CD

Now this is some corn-fed indie rock that I can endorse. This is the first time that I've actually heard The Casket Lottery, and I guess that I've been missing out. Almost immediately they reminded me of some other bands I dig, like Mock Orange or Kill Creek (whom they cover on here). But the more I listened, the more range I discovered in these 20 songs: dynamic, barely restrained rock music with great melodies and an original flair. Their newest CD is a collection of songs from 7-inches, compilations, demos and some unreleased studio sessions. Included along with a lot of great originals are a bunch of interesting cover songs by bands like The Police, The Cure, Government Issue and Helmet. Sign me up! (NS)
Second Nature, PO Box 413084, Kansas City, MO 64141-3084, www.secondnaturerecordings.com

∅ Cave Catt Sammy – Whiskey And The Devil, CD

At first listen, San Antonio's Cave Catt Sammy sounds like a straight-up classic rockabilly four piece: Texas-tinged vocals, no-frills drums,

Reviewer Spotlight: Eric Action (EA)

THE FALL, *I Am Kurious Oranj*. The Fall are rather popular these days, but that was not always the case. I remember distinctly in 1989 getting *I Am Kurious Oranj* along with two other Fall cassettes at a mall for two dollars a piece. At the time my turntable was broken, and I had recently gotten a car and driver's license, so cassettes were king. I stumbled upon these great Fall records by luck; no one had turned me onto them. I was only listening to Dischord and SST records at the time. I didn't know that Britain had any music worthwhile past the mid-'80s. So why pick *I Am Kurious Oranj*, the 1988 ballet accompaniment? Frankly it is my favorite record to put on while driving or cleaning the house. It probably isn't their best release, and I would send newbies to the *Frenz Experiment* instead. There is something about this LP—yes I rebought it years later—that just seems so organic. More of complete album without any real highlights, it just is one of the steadiest records of all time. The track "Kurious Oranj" has a ska-like rhythm that can keep you bopping all day. The "Overture From I Am Kurious Oranj" sounds more like an '80s rock ballad. A strange record that has stayed with me for 14 years and been enjoyable every time I drop the needle.

You should buy: The Fall, *Totally Wired* on big thick vinyl; new Live Oblivians LP; live Epoxies and the new Buff Medway is worth the import.



Cerebrus Shoal / Countdown to Life

upright bass and tight acoustic and electric guitars. The band's third release, *Whiskey And The Devil* includes a bevy of originals and covers ("Cast Iron Arm," "Your Money Makes You Party," "Right Around The Corner"). The kick is that these guys started when their collective ages equaled that of any one Sun Records' old-timer. Now in their 20s, their youth, talent and enthusiasm really comes through on this album. That convinces me they'll endure a long tenure in the business of Cadillacs, gin, party women and embroidered suits. While Cave Catt Sammy might never throw your ears a for a loop, with *Whiskey And The Devil*, you will get a seamless, classic rockabilly record whose players are exceedingly aware—and respectful—of their influences. (EG) Rubric Records, 356 Bowery, Second Floor, New York, NY 10012, www.rubricrecords.com

¶ Cerberus Shoal – Chaiming The Knoblessone, CD

For all of you folks interested in something a little different, a little crazy and a little more musically stimulating than what's on your turntable, then you should absolutely head to this band. Cerberus Shoal's sound is a blend of rock-opera and psychedelia humor that can seriously knock Humpty Dumpty about and put him back together again. Much of it appears completely nonsensical, but that's OK. You don't need to understand what's going on with this one. In fact, it's probably best that you don't. Just like with Alice and her rabbits, that's what makes it so ingenious. (SP)

North East Indie Records, PO Box 10315, Portland, ME 04104, www.northeastindie.com

Cheats, The – Cheap Pills, CD

Ugh, I can't take this anymore. Much like the pop-punk explosion a few years back, we're now flooded with bands that sound like The Hives. The Cheats would have perked my ears up a few years back. Is it their fault? No, but there are so many to choose from I can't suggest them first. (EA)

Da' Core Records, 1601 Banksville Road, 2nd Floor, Pittsburgh, PA 15216, www.da-core.com

Cheer-Accident – Gumball The Cat Soundtrack, CD

This hour-long CD by the improvisational band Cheer-Accident is the soundtrack to the accompanying 15-page *Gumball The Cat* comic book. So, I guess you're supposed to read the comic over and over again as this band's crappy noodling drives you mad. (AJ)

Skin Graft Records, PO Box 257546, Chicago, IL 60625, www.skingraftrecords.com

¶ Cinema Eye, The – A Complete Arsenal, CDEP

Liking this record, for me at least, meant getting past the impish electronic background noises that fizzle for much of the record, making you think a thousand phones are ringing in the distance. Maybe the noise is in my head, or maybe they're just trying to drive me nuts. Anyway, I did get past it, and I came to dig their brand of dark '80s-style synth-pop. The playing is skillful, the compositions are complex, and the atmosphere is thick. This five-song EP leaves me wanting more, and I will look for a full album. My one concern is kind of a meta-concern. The vocals are so expressive that, on their own, they create tons of drama. Add the keyboards, though, and it becomes

melodrama. Instead of evoking the belted and strummed tribulations of a real warm-blooded human being, it conjures the main character of an '80s movie. But then, that's The Cinema Eye. (DAL) Sound Virus, PO Box 55783, Valencia, CA 91385, www.sound-virus.com

¶ Circle – Vaudeville, CD

For some reason, these Nordic bands who've recently been crossing our borders with their Epiphones, tight blue jeans and Dutch accents seem to bring out my meathead Nationalistic tendencies. ("Who the hell do these Sven motherfuckers think they are?!! Don't try sellin' me some warmed over MC5 riffs!") But, I gotta give credit to Kristof, Dries and the rest of these dudes with funny names. Circle has made a solid rock 'n' roll record that doesn't really fall into that retro-American garage rock rip-off category. Yeah, there are a couple duds ("Tonite"), but overall this band knows how to lay down a groove that'll make yer ass shimmy. They fluidly transition from jazzy swing to full-on rawk in "Dance To Forget," and the guitar players do some nice descending blues runs during "Razor Blades." Pretty cool, regardless of where they're from. (AJ)

Reflections Records, Spoorwegstraat 117, 6828 AP Amhem, The Netherlands, www.reflectionsrecords.com

Clann Zú – Rua, CD

As rock music continues to jump, mix and mangle genres, some vital and interesting results are being produced despite so many missteps. Clan Zú falls squarely within the "interesting" category. The music blends rock, folk, electronica and classical. They lyrics are sung in a mix of Irish and English. (RR)

G7 Welcoming Committee Records, PO Box 27006, 360 Main Street Concourse, Winnipeg, MB, R3C 4T3, Canada, www.g7welcomingcommittee.com

Clearing Autumn Skies – Pulses & Matter, CDEP

Clearing Autumn Skies play dissonant, kinda heavy, metal with weird change-ups. There's some OK drumming and guitar playing, but absolutely no songs that make a lasting impression. Imminently forgettable. (AJ)

State Of Grace, PO Box 8345, Berkeley, CA 94707, www.stateofgrace.com

Close Call – Someone Talked, CD

A collection of songs from the past five years for this East Coast hardcore band. This is old-school style hardcore done to perfection. It's loud, fast and thrashy, and most importantly, they don't mess around with any of that metal crossover crap that few can pull off well. (MG)

Stab & Kill Records, PO Box 52084, Boston, MA 02152, www.stabandkill.com

Coheed And Cambria – In Keeping Secrets Of Silent Earth: 3, CD

These guys are pretty well-known, but I can't get into the singer's high-pitched, warbly voice. Vocals aside, the music is emotional-rock type stuff with a metal influence. There are lots of little changes and stops to keep things interesting, but it's a little too polished for my tastes. (KM)

Equal Vision, PO Box 14, Hudson, NY 12534, www.equalvision.com

¶ Cokes, The – First Album, CD

First Album is a 2003 release from a Japanese band that looks like it came out of England in 1979. The band photos, graphic design, and

color schemes all scream "old school power-pop/punk!" while I scream "yes please!" Like many others in the current wave of Japanese punk bands (Registrators, Firestarter, Radio Shanghai), The Cokes combine elements of '50s rock 'n' roll, '77 UK punk and '80s pop in such a way that it manages to sound simultaneously familiar and brand new. These are catchy, well-written pop songs that rock out like crazy. The recording is nice and raw, which gives it a trashy feel that reminds me of Teenage Head. Other apparent influences are The Boys and The Real Kids. Hmm...teenage, boys, kids—there seems to be a "youth" thing going on here. The Cokes definitely approach their punk with a youthful exuberance and enthusiasm. And like their soft drink namesake, it's completely refreshing. (JC)

Wizzard In Vinyl, www.wizzard-in-vinyl.com

¶ Collider – WCYF, CD

WOW! This band comes with great praise from the late great Joey Ramone and was produced by Tommy Ramone himself. But if what you expect is simple "Hey Ho, Let's Go" Ramones-type punk, you will be surprised. This band can write a catchy tune like no other: six excellent tunes with great, crisp production, nice bass lines and a vocalist who can sing and speak in a cool way to separate verses from refrains. Catchy and fun and, at times, predictable, but who cares when they are this good? The vocalist also adds in keyboards at just the right times to fulfill your sugary pop taste buds. The opener, "1991," is better than anything you will hear on the radio today, I guaran-fuckin'-tee that. Check this disc out. (BC)

Sonablast Records, 120 West Third St., Suite 19, New York, NY 10012, www.sonablast.com

Coma Eternal – I Am The End, CDEP

This sounds like emo death metal. I think you kids these days call it "screamo" (which sounds like some kind of a bastard super villain). It's interesting enough for the first three minutes, but there's no kicker, no follow through. It's all supposed to lead up to something, guys. (AJ)

The Nuance Formula, 819 North 15th #201, Milwaukee, WI 53233,

www.thenuanceformula.com

Cool Concern, The – Demo, CDEP

This trio of brothers make fast, semipoppy punk with nice pacing and good vocalists (a little Fugazi-ish if you will). Pretty good stuff (though I don't get the picture of a woman turning into a gun on the cover). (SP)

Self-released, www.thecoolconcern.com

Cougars – Nice, Nice, CD

This Chicago octet uncomfortably shifts from noisy garage to frenzied arena-rock riffage to bass-heavy Jesus Lizard postpunk, but with blasting horns stringing things together. A weak link, but once they streamline their sound to their strengths, they could possibly be the second coming of Rocket From The Crypt. (VC)

Go Kart Records, PO Box 20, New York, NY 10012, www.gokartrecords.com

Countdown To Life – Tragedy Is So Irresistible, CD

Old school meets new school: a nice blend of tough, old style hardcore and newer school emotion. There are moments when I think they

Reviewer Spotlight: Jay Castaldi (JC)

M.O.T.O., *Kill M.O.T.O.* A few years ago, my band appeared on the infamous Chicago local access dance show for kiddies and weirdoes, *Chic-A-Go-Go*. The other band on that episode was M.O.T.O. (Masters Of The Obvious). I'd seen the name around for years, but had never heard them before that day. The song they lip-synched was a two-minute pop-punk gem called "Dance Dance Dance Dance To The Radio." So simple it's almost retarded, the song is all of two chords and three different lines of lyrics, repeated over and over again like the Ramones playing a Vaselines tune. The song stuck in my head for weeks and basically changed my life. I had to learn more about the band behind it. M.O.T.O. is essentially Paul Caporino, who has been recording simple, stupid pop songs with a revolving cast of musicians since the mid-1980s. Since then, M.O.T.O. have released around 20 different albums (although most of them are on home-dubbed cassettes), each filled with awesome little punk-rock masterpieces. *Kill M.O.T.O.* is their latest release, and it includes the aforementioned "...Dance to the Radio" and 16 other instant classics as great as their titles: "I Hate My Fucking Job," "The Chicks Can Tell," "I Am A Bomb," etc. The production is great, the guitars are cranking, and the lyrics are all well written and not afraid to be funny. This is a super-fun record from a long-running and long-overlooked band.

I'm lovin' it: The Bronx, S/T; The Cokes, *First Album* (reviewed this issue); The Gain, ABCD&E, Tyrades, S/T; Undertones, *Get What You Need*.

might have had some pop-punk experience, and the subtly metal guitar parts keep these guys from the ranks of generic mosh metal. If you miss old Grade and Boy Sets Fire, here's your replacement. (NS) State of Grace, PO Box 8345, Berkeley, CA 94707, www.stateofgracehc.com

Countdown To Putsch – Interventions In Hegemony, CD

They're revolutionary, and they have horns, but Nation Of Ulysses they're not. Two CDs' worth of free form noodling behind rambling lefty spoken word and occasional roaring. It's anarchic in form as well as content; it's such an avalanche of words and sound that it lacks focus. (DAL) The Crimethinc. Ex-Workers' Foundation for the Advancement of Anarchist Fine Arts, PO Box 2133, Greensboro, NC, 27402, www.crimethinc.com

Cracked Pavement Curse – Is This A Future?, CD

A tiny 3-inch CD holds five acoustic performances that range from inspired to lackluster. Given time to hone his vocal skills and improve on the already impressive writing, Jon Wood may become a singer/songwriter to keep an eye on. This record announces that he's on his way. (BN) Running Riot Records, 15 Denver Road, Dartford, Kent DA1 3LA, UK, www.runningriotrecords.co.uk

Crestfallen – S/T, CD

Well-executed, screamy hardcore that's short and to the point. You know, instead of always playing the Jerome's Dream rhythm, they'll play the Life's Halt one, too. Does that make any sense? Nice traditional Minor Threat and Cramps covers, too. Another winner from Robotic Empire. (DH) Robotic Empire, PO Box 4211, Richmond VA 23220, www.roboticempire.com

Crimes Of The Conspiracy – When Your Get This Letter Burn It, 7"

This advanced, PhD-level hardcore 7" from North Dakota was released posthumously after a premature break-up. It defies classification by borrowing from emo, old-school hardcore and many of today's new hardcore sounds. "This Is Not A Piercing," the song about hardcore permanence that opens this record, is terrific. (AE) Pop Riot Records, PO Box 14985, Minneapolis, MN 55414, www.popriotrecords.com

Curtains, The – Flybys, CD

This disc sounds like they are learning their instruments and tuning them at the same time. They find a cute little melodic guitar and keyboard riff and play the damn thing over and over. This stuff is not for me, not for you, just for the boys in the band. (BC) Thin Wrist, 12920 San Vicente Blvd., LA, CA 90049, www.thinwrist.com

Cut The Shit – Harmed And Dangerous, 12"

Pure, angry hardcore. Yeah, it's all been done before. But when you play with as much conviction as this four-piece does, you can get away with having a lack of originality—and still sound convincing. Play this record at 33 rpm, and it sounds even cooler than at its intended 45 rpm speed! (AJ) Gloom Records, PO Box 14253 Albany, NY 12212, www.gloomrecords.com

Dakota Suite – This River Only Brings Poison, CD

Seventy-two minutes of gentle acoustic guitar, piano, strings and moaned/whispered singing. Best night's sleep I've had in months. (JC) Planting Seeds Records, PO Box 64665, Virginia Beach, VA 23467

Danko Jones – Born A Lion, CD

Somewhere between Robert Johnson's lemon-squeezing metaphors and David Lee Roth's ice-cream imagery lies the lyrical content of *Born A Lion*. Musically it's all punked up hard blues. Occasionally the line between classic rock 'n' roll sexual allusion and outright cockrock is steamrolled right over. (RR)

Simba Recordings, www.simbarecordings.com

Darlington – Moron-A-Thon, CD

One of the best titles and cover art I have seen all year. What's inside is some good, basic pop-punk played by some lads from the Netherlands. If you're into bands that sing stuff like "I love you girl/you're beautiful" in a punk-rock tune, then get this. (BC) StarDumb Records, PO Box 21145, 3001 Rotterdam, The Netherlands www.stardumbrecords.com

Daughters – Canada Songs, CD

Canada Songs is one part "Let's Eat This Bag Of Mushrooms And Start A Grind Band" and one part "How To Be A Technical Band Without Being Super-Pretentious." Here a blast, there some double bass, everywhere a bunch of screaming. Can this label do any wrong? (DH) Robotic Empire, PO Box 4211, Richmond VA 23220, www.roboticempire.com

Dead By July – Before Dishonor... CDEP

Dead By July whip up some hard-driving Midwestern punk rock with anathemic choruses. The vocals are sincere and throaty, without being too gruff. Excellent twin-guitar attack and tasteful solos. This EP has me betting they'd put on a great show in a tiny bar with no stage. (JC) Bockhorn Records, PO Box 10238, Beverly Hills, CA 90213, www.bockhorn.com

Dead Letter Auction – Cancer Of Time, CD

I love this record. Dead Letter Auction play quiet/loud indie rock with a harder edge. This little demon is filled to the brim with tempo changes and beautifully dissonant guitar lines. The songs have lots of melody and instrumentation, so there's never a dull moment. The guitars are simply amazing and, at times, remind me of Engine Down or Shotmaker. I don't think there's a bad song on this whole CD. There are quiet moments, but the urgency and energy never let up. The vocals are done in the shouted/sung way that fits so well with this style of music. Great band. (KM)

Excursions Into The Abyss, PO Box 50138, Ft. Wayne, IN 46805-0138, www.excursionsintotheabyss.com

Death Cab For Cutie – Transatlanticism, CD

Easy Death Cab's best record to date, *Transatlanticism* finds the band building richly on their sound: poppy, incredibly catchy indie rock ("New Year," "The Sound Of Settling," "We Looked Like Giants") to almost-still quiet songs that capture moments like photographs ("Lightness," "Tiny Vessels," "Passenger Seat") and parts in between ("Title And Registration," "A Lack Of Color," the seven-plus-minute epic "Transatlanticism"). The record's production, too, is more pro than its predecessors. The lush layers and sounds at the end of "We Looked Like Giants" really show how guitarist/pianist Chris Walla, who recorded *Transatlanticism*, has certainly come a long way. Primary songwriter

Ben Gibbard is an excellent lyricist and has a staggering ability to capture moments and set them to music. A thousand crappy emo bands wish they could pull this off, but Death Cab is special because they make it look so effortless. I can't recommend *Transatlanticism* enough. (KR) Barsuk Records, PO Box 22546, Seattle, WA 98122, www.barsuk.com

Death Comet Crew – DCC America, CD

New-school breakdancers should be spinning these old-school, experimental breakbeats. Death Comet Crew's 1985 release, *At The Marble Bar*, played a part in capturing the sound of New York City dance clubs at a time when hip hop was emerging as a viable commodity, but before it truly had a chance to flesh out some of its weird, untested realms. DCC's slick, subway-speed skating effects explore the experimental and even undanceable side of hip-hop. But the beat is steady, and the schizophrenic sound samples are the stuff that, not only hip-hop, but its weird Goth cousin, industrial, was built on. Both capture the human-made buzz of urban society, the mind-meld of beats with a blood-pumping pulse and samples firing off like neurons with flashes of neon. DCC's version of their America is just that: the energy that seethes from the underground, dense and hot. (CC) Troublemaker Unlimited, 16 Willow St., Bayonne, NJ 07002, www.troublemanunlimited.com

Death Squad – S/T, 7"

Members of The Oath and Limpwrist slap out three fast hardcore tracks on plain white vinyl. I'm sure you can't miss the cover at your local record store, as it has a line of Brown Shirts hailing Hitler. Regardless of the cover art, these guys are anti-fascist, and they play some tight hardcore. (TK) Youth Attack Records, www.youthattackrecords.com

Deatherage, Todd – Dream Upon A Fallen Star, CD

When a boy loses a girl, he turns to country music, according to the onesheet accompanying Todd Deatherage's debut. But Deatherage doesn't just throw his tears in his beer. His rolling croon can be a defiant Neil Diamond, a wounded Chris Isaak and a cross-dressed Etta James. Beautiful, grassy arrangements make this a keeper. (SM) Summer Break Records, PO Box 720087, Dallas, TX 75372, www.summerbreakrecords.com

DeathXDeath – The Glamour Of Evil, CD

Death-metal growling, hardcore with a dash of punk. Energetic and grabbing. First few songs are gloomy while the rest of the album gets louder. (SP) Self-released, www.deathxdeath.com

Dedspace / Constants In Breaking – split, CD

The Dedspace side is unusual because the songs are extremely accessible and poppy, but then they lapse into extreme mellowness. The vocals are so low-key he almost sounds like Ed Grimley on Quaaludes. Constants In Breaking turns the sullen pop into chunky hard rock with vocals oscillating, surreally, between growly and whiny. (DAL) Radar Recordings, PO Box 1205 Allston, MA 02134, www.radarrecordings.com

Defiance Of Authority – H-Town Angels, CDEP

This six-song collection roared like a lion. The CD was out of sight. (I miss you Wesley Willis). In all seriousness, this CD rocked my ass off.

Reviewer Spotlight: Vincent Chung (VC)

THE DIVINYLS, *Desperate*. Remember the 1991 radio hit, "I Touch Myself" that shared the limelight with "The Shoop Shoop Song (It's In His Kiss)" but got trumped by yet another Whitney Houston single? Does anyone remember the video for this single depicting singer Christina Amphlett in a fishnet dress groping anything that fits in a palm? Yowzers! While pop culture let The Divinyls fade away into One-Hit Wonderland with Frankie Smith and Big Country, those who got past the blushing might have been fortunate to unearth this Australian band's promising back catalog. In particular, this 1982 debut LP stands alone as a well-received, yet forgotten, piece of new wave. As fans tired of the sterile synthpop beats of the genre, The Divinyls carried some raw Pretenders-ish edge into the mix but added the accessible pop sensibility of Blondie. The lead off track, "Boys In Town" is an aggressive '80s hard-rock anthem. "Siren Song" features a stomping beat and male/female vocals (the other Divinyls mainstay, Mark McEntee, offers his voice) reminiscent of The Revillos. The rest of the record falls in line with solid female-fronted pop rock with a harder edge. Lyrically, *Desperate* is their darkest record, offering cynical songs about hopelessness and frustration—most likely from the weariness of performing in sleazy Sydney clubs. As The Divinyls gained popularity, Amphlett the Angry Bombshell blossomed into Amphlett the Sexy Diva and, well, even middle America knows the rest of the story.

Songs I have raised a pint to in bars: "Firestorm" by Earth Crisis, "Doublewhiskeycokenoice" by Dillinger Four, "Throwaway Style" by The Exploding Hearts, "If It Kills You" by Drive Like Jehu, "Good Head" by Turbonegro



It's a really raw collection of sincere, unpolished punk rock that has more love than any major/huge indie/punk label band. It actually reminds me of LookOut! Records bands from back in the day. Gritty, upbeat, in your face and still a whole lot of fun—that usually gets lost in a lot of bigger recording studio mixes of similar bands. Sure, it isn't perfect, and some parts may seem a tad lost in the mix, but this is like listening to pop punk back when it was still "punk" and not just "pop." This band deserves much love, so buy this because, even if you don't dig it, a portion of the proceeds goes to the Make A Wish Foundation. Too cool. (DM)

Self-released, 313 12th Ave. Burlington, WV 25701, www.defianceofauthorityrocks.com

Delta India Echo – They Found My Naked Corpse Face Down In The Snow, 7"

Noisy metalcore played with little, if any, dexterity. All the songs are short and indistinguishable from one another. What scares me, even more than the truly evil nature of this music, is the fact that I kinda like it. Lord only knows what'd happen if you played it backwards. (AJ)

Grey Sky Records, 1339 NE Roselawn, Portland, OR 97211, www.greyskyrecords.com

Denali – The Instinct, CD

The sophomore Denali record could have been called *Emotions* because it forces the listener through dozens of them nine times. While vocalist/guitarist/keyboardist Maura Davis' voice is inarguably gorgeous—hitting highs and lows and spine-chilling vibratos in between—it's also cold and haunting. Denali's testosterone-totin' sum includes brother bassist/keyboardist Keeley Davis; drummer Jonathan Fuller and guitarist Cam DiNunzio. The emotionally charged title track would be good for background music while writing a kiss-off letter or drowning out rush-hour traffic. Davis puts significant power behind her pipes and even yodels (in a very cool, fashion-model way). The drums and guitars constantly build up and explode with the vocals. There are a few sulky, ambient tracks like "Do Something," "Nullaby" and "Welcome," but they're nicely intertwined with heavier ones so it's never long before you're startled awake. Perhaps the most rocking track is "Hold Your Breath" with its fuzzy guitar solo and schizo vocals. (EG)

Jade Tree, 2310 Kenwynn Rd., Wilmington, DE 19810, www.jadetree.com

Desert Fathers, The – The Spirituality, CD

Weird, guitar-driven rock (?) with way too many effects on said guitar and vocals. Maybe I'm not hip enough, but it seems pretentious. Also, I have never seen a label pimp themselves more than this one—way too much emphasis within the packaging on who released this rather than the music itself. (DH)

Threespheres, PO Box 349 Brooklyn, NY 11222, www.threespheres.com

Digital Kill, The – S/T, CDEP

Four beautiful, droning, melancholy-drenched melodies reminiscent of old Sunny Day Real Estate and Mineral. The genre itself has been overplayed to the point of disgust, but these guys seriously have their own sound, as this 29-minute EP proves nicely. (TK)

Self-released, www.thedigitalkill.com

Reviewer Spotlight – Carla Costa (CC)

ORCHESTRAL MANOEUVRES IN THE DARK, S/T. You might recognize O.M.D. as the band whose hit "If You Leave" was the '80s prom theme. Especially the prom in John Hughes' *Pretty In Pink*, where Andie tragically chooses that loser, Blane, over Ducky. A move that any sensible person will tell you is a mistake. Why? Well, besides the undying devotion, killer snakeskin shoes and the Otis Redding sing along, Ducky is the kind of guy who'd hear "If You Leave" at his prom after being dumped by the love of his life and think: "Their first record was so amazing." And it is. O.M.D.'s self-titled debut was released just a year after Joy Division's *Unknown Pleasures*. Both bands took the influences of Kraftwerk, C&N and Neu! and brought new life to synthetic music. But where Joy Division added acute pain and a sumptuous darkness, O.M.D. brought irreverence in matters of love, politics and aesthetics. O.M.D.'s pop genius forever intertwined quirkiness, warmth and passion with electronic music, effortlessly (almost rationally) fusing the ebb and throb of plastic rhythms and keyboard-created melodies with lyrics and vocal harmonies teeming with yearning. O.M.D. knows all about the Duckys of the world: everyone who has wanted, has loved and lost, then analyzed it into tiny pieces of rational thought packed with emotional neurosis that, like this album, are always, inevitably, the mental soundtrack for bittersweet endings and new beginnings.

Winter is for sad bastards like me: Richard Buckner, *Devotion + Doubt*; Neko Case, *Canadian Amp*; Edith Frost, *Wonder, Wonder*; Nina Nastasia, *The Blackened Air*; Elliott Smith, *Either/Or*.

Delta India Echo / Down to Nothing

under the ass of some American heavy-metal think-tank. It's not as if they've rewritten the book on heavy music; they've just perfected it. This album is full of crushing metal played with punk-rock sensibility. I'm not sure if it's the galloping drums (don't expect blast beats) or the tunefulness of these songs that make them so forceful. Maybe it's the well-placed solos that aren't as much technical as they are wailing. These songs get stuck in your head fast and get your head banging even faster. Just because I mentioned Sweden, this isn't another Gothenburg sound alike—even though Tomas Lindberg of At The Gates fame is on vocals. His "singing" is as great as ever, but Disfear has him singing over music that has more in common with Integrity than death metal. I really haven't heard many compelling metal bands lately, but I've been listening to this CD continually. It's one of the saving graces of being stuck in Topeka this week. (NS)

Relapse Records, PO Box 2060, Upper Darby PA 19082, www.relapse.com

Dishes, The – Three, CD

The Dishes are dripping in sassy attitude, like a big sister who would buy you beer when you're underage, keep your change and then rat you out to mom and dad just for kicks. Perhaps that sassy attitude was the motivation behind opening this album with a nine-and-a-half minute guitar-wanking jam. But if you can get past that, there's some good, dirty garage rock in store for you. This imaginatively titled disc is The Dishes' third long-player, and it comes closest to capturing their live sound. That's partly due to producer Tim Kerr's "less-is-more" approach, which keeps things loose and nasty while highlighting all the band's strong points. The riffs are cool, the songwriting is stronger than ever before, and The Dishes have a winner on their hands. Your beer money is theirs for the taking. (JC)

File 13 Records, PO Box 804868, Chicago, IL 60680, www.file-13.com

Diverse – One A.M., CD

Diverse kicks out excellent hip hop with rapid-fire rhymes over midtempo beats. It's also free from lots of stupid posturing like mainstream rap, and that helps immensely. Clever, smart rhymes, nice melodic elements and samples, and rad scratching. All substance, no bullshit. For fans of Dig Plan, Tribe, etc. (KR)

Chocolate Industries, #442, 1537 N. Milwaukee Ave., Chicago, IL 60622, www.chocolateindustries.com

Divide By Zero – Mirrors, CDEP

Whoa! Personal lyrics are screamed and sung instead of whined on this stellar EP. Fans of Dillinger Four won't want to miss this band that sounds almost exactly like D4, only harder. The members have all been in popular bands previously, including Logan's Loss and John Brown Battery. (AE)

Sinister Label, PO Box 1178, LaGrange Park, IL 60526, www.sinisterlabel.com

Down To Nothing – Save It For The Birds, CD

It's no wonder that his hardcore epic of a debut full-length was picked up by a relatively big label. It's top-notch positivist straight-edge hardcore, played with mechanical perfection. This CD captures the '80s

hardcore spirit perfectly, and it will likely be remembered in towns far away from their Richmond base. (AE)

Thorp Records, PO Box 6786, Toledo, OH 43612, www.thorprecords.com

DSC Project, The – Very Number One, CD

Power pop from Florida that reminds me of Weezer, from the guitars to the vocals. There are some pretty-sounding parts here and there, but most of the songs are a little too radio-friendly for this lady. I still might keep this for the fourth song. (KM)

Self-released, 591 N.W. Kilpatrick Ave. Port St. Lucie, FL 24983, www.thedscproject.com

Dutch Flat, The – Ghosts, CD

In the world of indie rock, these cats are quite progressive. Each instrument plays a role, and they have interesting build-ups and break-downs. However, it's kind of "sad bastard" at times and feels like a long car ride with a depressed kid reciting bad poetry. (DM)

Woodson Lateral Records, 2112 S. Spokane St., Seattle, WA 98144,

www.woodsonlateral.com

Dynasty – S/T, CD

Dynasty's pro-fuck sentiment is that of Peaches cubed. The seven no wave/dance-inspired cuts here move from sexuality to loneliness to protest and back to sex. Some of the synth work is migraine-inducing, but overall, Dynasty spawns the ultimate tough-but-sexy ladies' night soundtrack. Roofies, Mono Pause and the Numbers members represent. (EG)

Tigerbeat6, PO Box 460922 San Francisco, CA 94146-0922, www.tigerbeat6.com

Eastern Youth – What Can You See From Your Place, CD

The above line is all you'll understand on this record, unless you speak Japanese. One of the current hype bands, Eastern Youth play post-punk with an indie-rock edge—all of it in Japanese. There isn't a word of English to help you understand any of it, which I think is rad. I say play your music in the vernacular and never mind trying to catch on in the U.S. Apparently this band hasn't needed the help; they've toured with Cursive and played with bands like At The Drive-In and Jimmy Eat World. Like a couple of those bands, these guys are relatively poppy. And like those bands, Eastern Youth's vocals get strained big time when singer Hisashi Yosino aims for the upper registers. Some post-punk traits transcend culture, I guess. Although I wasn't blown away by this record, I think it will grow on me. Recommended. (KR)

[FiveOneInc](http://www.fiveoneinc.com), www.fiveoneinc.com

Eastside Suicides – S/T, CD

We have been flooded with Heartbreakers and Stooges clones lately and the Eastside Suicides are no exception. The best thing about this disc is that it's obvious that the background vocals were given the attention they deserve, unlike many other bands of said genre. Recommended for fans of junkie rock. (EA)

Super Secret Records, PO Box 1585, Austin, TX 78767, www.supersecretrecords.com

Echocast – Where The Future Ends, CD

It just occurred to me that there will always be the desire to get on the radio. Not college radio, but the radio that is burdened by Puddle Of

Mudd or whatever. Echocast could easily join their heroes with their slick power-rock and Saliva-like delivery. Shoot for the stars, boys. (SM)

XS Records, PO Box 120608, Nashville, TN 37212-9998, www.xsrecords.com

Ed Gein – It's A Shame That A Family Can Be Torn Apart By Something As Simple As A Pack of Wild Dogs, CD

There must be a lot to be angry about in Syracuse, because this band is fucking pissed. Defying categorization, Ed Gein take the actions of the brutal serial killer and turn them into songs. Devastating blasts, breakdowns and an overall chaotic nature are the M.O. of this three-piece. Get this! (DH)

Hanging Hex, 201 Maple Lane, North Syracuse NY 13212, www.hanginghex.com

Eggers, Jared – Fluorescent Twilight, CD

Somewhere between the quirky delivery of Chris Knox and the lo-fi sound of Paul Westerberg lies a territory Jared Eggers calls home. Dipping one foot on the side of mature songwriting while holding onto his experimental nature, Eggers delivers an album full of intimate recordings that defy classification. (BN)

United Kingdom Of America Records, 118 Franklin St. #2, Brooklyn, NY 11222

Ego, Gregory – I Want To Be A Billionaire

Ego goes cerebral and goofy in equal measures, like a Jonathan Richman/Atom And His Package super-bot. An investment banker who kicks it to Dr. Demento during his power lunches. (SM)

Self-released, PO Box 481262, Denver, CO 80248, www.gregoryego.com

Eight-Counts, The – Save Your Local Scene, CD

Generic Saturday nite, pub rawk 'n'roll that is some what reminiscent of the Street Walkin' Cheetahs and New Bomb Turks. The imitation record sleeve packaging is pretty cool, though. (GBS)

Self-released, www.theeight-counts.com

El Centro – Prohibido, CD

Some of the most melodic, poppy and catchy punk rock I've ever heard, along the lines of Bad Religion/Fat Wreck Chords fare. Certainly worth checking out if you're into that sort of thing, even though they sometimes dabble a little too heavy into Sublime territory with the reggae-based songs. (MG)

Finger Records, 2931 W. Central Ave. Unit D, Santa Ana, CA 92704, www.fingerrecords.com

El Nada – Nothing For Nobody, CD

Hectic-ass Orange County punk rock like hasn't been played since the early '90s. It's definitely on a Cadillac Tramps and Los Infernos tip, with songs about surfing, skating, fucking and being pissed off at stuff (nothing specific though, just stuff). (GBS)

Finger Records, 2931 W. Central Ave. Unit D, Santa Ana, CA 92704, www.fingerrecords.com

Electric Eye – Electric Wisdom, CD

The Electric Eye have released this new compact disc on Dirlap, my favorite label of the last few years. The vocals are very harsh, and the music is five-piece guitar rock. The energy and gusto rise above the mediocrity, raising your fists for more AC/DC. Right on brothers, rock on. (EA)

Dirlap Records, PO Box 21249, Seattle, WA 98111, www.dirlaprecords.com

Reviewer Spotlight: Brian Czarnik (BC)

REVOLTING COCKS, *Beers, Steers & Queers*. The best industrial record ever, this gem came out in 1990 and pretty much gave the Chicago Wax Trax Records industrial scene a good ass-fucking. 1990 was when Ministry was getting harder and Trent and his Nine Inch Nails were about to take the radio world by storm. But RevCo (featuring members of Ministry) were a little too "out there" to be on the radio. Their live shows often featured nudity and complete chaos. Their songs were about going insane, killing people and sex. They had records before and after this one, but nothing came close to the raw power of *Beers, Steers & Queers*. The heavy-ass electronic drum beats pushed up against distorted guitars and plenty of vocal samples all drive you to the brink of insanity. From the opening of the title track, which features two rednecks on the phone discussing going to a Revolting Cocks show, to the heavy house-rap beats of "Something Wonderful," this record is a perfect slice of industrial rock. Olivia Newton-John's "Physical" never sounded so damn good. The classic Chicago dance hit "Stainless Steel Providers" starts off side two. I loved being a part of the Chicago music scene in the '90s, and this was probably the best record to dance to when you were in some dark, alternative night club after a punk show at 2 a.m. Grade A blue-collar, gritty electronic rock/industrial rock at its finest.

Five CDs closest to my CD player: Iron Maiden, *Maiden Live*; Tigermountain, *Analogs Heads Gone French*; Rush, *Presto*; Bad Religion, *All Ages*; and some CD comp my girlfriend made for me with that Norah Jones song, Elvis, Goo Goo Dolls and Barry Manilow on it.

Electric Frankenstein / El Nada – Electric Frankenstein Meets El Nada, CD

E.F. are on the big rawk 'n' roll trip while El Nada have a straight up, Orange County punk-rock tone that's somewhere between the Cadillac Tramps and the Adolescents. Then there's the hot rod artwork that's a cross between a Rob Zombie and Rat Fink. Pretty cool. (GBS)

Finger Records, 2931 W. Central Ave. Unit D, Santa Ana, CA 92704, www.fingerrecords.com

Electro Group / St. Avalanche – split, 7"

Two songs each from two experimental Sacramento bands. It's a strong outing from Electro Group, with a more traditionally catchy song and a more challenging piece, plus a keyboard-doused pair from St. Avalanche. Crazy and striking packaging includes an x-ray record sleeve and acetate insert that rapidly filled with fingerprints. (DAL)

Clairerecords, 1812 J St., Sacramento, CA 95814, www.clairerecords.com

Embodyment – Songs For The Living

Bite off a chunk of a Three Doors Down-wurst, and this soulless and originality-lacking record leaves a bad taste in your mouth. The third song, "Golden Rule," speaks about treating others the way you like to be treated. It's a concept to consider before recording an album of day-old snoozers. (SM)

XS Records, PO Box 120608, Nashville, TN 37212-9998, www.xsrecords.com

Emmanuel 7 – Machines In Routine, CD

Positive: very much heavy and technical at points. Negative: This band needs to find a direction and stick with it. Too many variations on the "hardcore" theme to make for an easy listen. (DH)

Thorp Records, PO Box 6786, Toledo OH 43612, www.thorprecords.com

Emery Reel – S/T, CD

Utter noise. Tracks ranging from six to 14 minutes of going nowhere. Repetitive keyboards and spacey guitars driving me to death. This is seriously the slowest, most boring thing I have ever put in the car while driving. More time was spent on the great packaging then writing these songs. (EA)

First Flight, PO Box 21631, St. Louis, MO 63109, www.firstflightrecordlabel.com

Endless Struggle – Till The End, CD

Salt Lake City's Endless Struggle have garnered a substantial following over the past seven years due to their infectious streetpunk. This is only their second full-length, but they've been playing many of these songs for a while is part of what makes this long-awaited release such a worthy addition to your punk library. A common criticism of "drunk punk" or "fashion punk" is that it tends to be apolitical. Considering Endless Struggle's stupid nationalist song about September 11th, "Payback," we might be better off if bands stick to the personal and social. Besides that one song, there isn't anything on here lyrically that would rile even the more PC punks in your town. Standout tracks include a fun, anti-religious song, "Religious Fools" and a great



The Entropy Project / Fleshies

song about hypocritical old bands reuniting, "20 Years." Fans of The Unseen will love this CD, and its timeless sound will keep it from fading into obscurity. (AE)

A-F Records, PO Box 71266, Pittsburgh, PA 15213, www.a-frecords.com

Entropy Project, The / Screwjack – split, 12"

Entropy Project's contribution to this split features a nearly nonstop hardcore assault that may just cause permanent hearing damage. If you survive long enough to switch sides, Screwjack will finish the job with an onslaught of post-apocalyptic proportions. It's just too bad neither of these bands stuck around. (BN)

Excursion Records, PO Box 20224, Seattle, WA 98102, www.excursionrecords.com

♀ Envy – A Dead Sinking Story, CD

I've championed these Japanese badasses here for a couple of years now: their unrelenting intensity, their dexterity with different strains of post-punk. *Sinking Story* shows the band getting ambitious: Only one song is shorter than five minutes, and most are between six and eight minutes. With that kind of length, the songs have plenty of room to make 180-degree turns, and they do. As in "Unrepairable Gentleness," what starts out as balls-out post-punk (like a more aggro *Trail Of Dead*) eventually becomes super-quiet and mellow. The entire album is like this, shifting between head-splitting intensity and quiet interludes that sound like the eye of the storm passing overhead. The vocals are mostly screamed in Japanese, but there are a couple of instances of mellow singing and speaking. Envy seemed intent on making an epic record, and they accomplished that. Although this can drag at times, it's still worth checking out. (KR)

Level Plane, PO Box 4329, Philadelphia, PA 19118, www.level-plane.com

♀ Eskimo – Substitution, 12"

This is a vinyl-only release with the song titles printed on side A only. Luckily, I put on side B with its noisier loops by this electroclash punk group, because I wanted to compare Eskimo to something Chuck from the All Scars would do. This record is right there with some of the best cinema scores or New York minimalist recordings. The loops can really keep your attention as you try to uncover the source of the noises. That is until you listen to side A, which includes a loop of Fugazi's "Blueprint." Skipping "The Waiting Game" and going straight to "Compromised," the record is even more compelling, with some screams and even better electronic drum and bass beats. What does "The Waiting Game" sound like? It's a record skipping in a haunted house. *Substitution* is worth tracking down. It'll sound really good on your turntable. (DI)

Lost And Found Records, Number 3 35 Greencroft Gds, London, NW6 3LN, UK

Evil Army – Conquer Human Life, 7"

Give Lemmy a pen and tell him to rewrite Misfits tunes, and this is what you'd have. These guys could have easily done a split with Rigor Mortis or a band of that nature. (DH)

Contaminated Records, PO Box 41953 Memphis, TN 38174

♀ Evil Beaver – Pleased To Eat You, CD

Two women, one bass and one drum set producing some of the hottest and most intense hard rock and metal sounds on the scene

these days. This shit rocks, in the most literal sense of the word. Who knew that just two instruments could create such sonic damage in the world of rock? These songs are complex and interesting and prime candidates for maximum head-banging. I hear elements of Black Sabbath (sped up a little and without the stoner stigma), the Fucking Champs (if they had some strong and snarling lady vocals), L7 (with some lighter melodies), early Metallica—you get the point. Plus, you can't go wrong with song titles like "Ass Salad" and "The Nutcracker." Sleazy, smart and balls-out are the perfect combination here. (MG)

Frooty Nation Records/Johann's Face Records, PO Box 479164, Chicago, IL 60647

Evil Jake – Be My Ex-Girlfriend, CD

Roman Tsukerman did a nice job with the artwork: a cool picture of a woman getting her a new lover's name inked on her arm. In that situation, we hope they never leave and force us to re-ink. With this generic pop-punk record, though, it doesn't look good. (DI)

Self-released, 715 Central Ave., Woodmere, NY 11598, www.eviljake.com

Famous In Vegas – Peace On Earth, CD

Famous In Vegas are a rockabilly band drawing influence from bands like the Cramps and (sometimes) the Ramones. Nothing special, but the song about little girls working in sweatshops was pretty moving. Added bonus: They have the best record label name ever. (KM)

Broken Down Volvo Of Hate, 4228 Pine St. 2nd Floor, Philadelphia, PA 19104

Faster Disaster – Exploding Head Phenomenon, CD

I am always suspicious of bands that have been around for five or more years and finally are releasing their first record. Faster Disaster are so generic that they are the band that play in the background in any '80s movie bar scene. Crap rock, wuss rock, you decide. (EA)

Screaming Pancakes Records, 9594 First Avenue NE, #175, Seattle, WA 98115-2012

Fatal Flying Guillotine – Get Knifed, CD

Totally agro emo that's bouncing off the walls and in your face. The wild bass-guitar rhythms that roll like a diesel truck down the highway remind me a bit of Rye Coalition. (GBS)

Estrus Records, PO Box 2125, Bellingham, WA 98227, www.estrus.com

♀ Faulty, The – The Kids Are Ready, CD

Truth is, the kids likely aren't ready for an album this complex and poignant. I can't remember the last time I heard a record with such clarity and so open to a multitude of influences. Full of anger, passion and rawness, *The Kids Are Ready* marks the alliance of hardcore, indie rock and punk, which lends itself to an emotional barrage on multiple levels. What makes this record stand out is the way the band seamlessly transcends genre borders and how smoothly this translates in their sound. While it may be a bit premature to laud a band this early in their history, I'm not one to hold back my excitement. Fuck the kids, I'm ready for more. (BN)

Self-released, www.thefaulty.com

Feeling Left Out – Two To The Chest To Remember, One To The Head To Forget, CD

Oh man, a painfully obvious Dashboard Confessional wannabe band. Acoustic guitars and painful teenage poetry, sure to be chanted by

their disciples of young girls and sissies, sitting around the band at their coffeehouse (for now) gigs. This has nothing to do with punk. Send straight to *Teen People* next time. (NS)

LLR Recordings, 1566 W. Algonquin Rd., Hoffman Estates, IL 60195, www.llrrecords.com

Fernandez, Flo – Prairie d' Amour, CD

Breezy, acoustic indie pop along the lines of Rhett Miller's solo work. At times, the music is thematic in a hipster, bossa nova kind of way, but otherwise, pretty low key. (GBS)

Dian Records, dianrecordings@gmx.net

Fight Dirty – Making Up Stories, CD

Quirky and silly pop/indie with lots of childish lyrics ("My eardrums are small so I can't hear you at all" and "We went to Boston for the music scene/ we went to Boston not for same baked beans"). A little repetitive, as most indie is, but fun nonetheless. (SP)

Self-released, www.rockingout.com

Fifth Hour Hero – Scattered Sentences, CD

Melodic punk with abundant guitars, singalong choruses and boy/girl vocals. What it lacks in originality, Fifth Hour Hero makes up for in sheer intensity and resolve. *Scattered Sentences* is a strong effort and exemplifies the importance of incorporating enthusiasm, energy and passion into music to give it life. (BN)

No Idea Records, PO Box 14636, Gainesville, FL 32604, www.noidearecords.com

Flash Express, The – Introducing The Dynamite Sound Of, CD

Heavy, rocking soul music along the lines of your Blues Explosion and your Mooney Suzuki. This has a really great sound, which makes me guess they'd be pretty killer live, but the songs don't really hook you enough to stand up on record. (JC)

Hit It Now! Records, www.hititnowrecords.com

Fireapple Red – S/T, CD

British political punks play a stylish combination of pop punk, hardcore and thrash, all wrapped up in melodious perfection. References include: Avail, Thrice, Propagandhi, etc. (MG)

Good Clean Fun Records, 48 Cardigan Rd., Haverfordwest, Pembrokeshire, SA61 2QN, Wales, www.goodcleanfunrecords.co.uk

Flatliners, The – Safe Side Suicide, 12"

Street punk/hardcore five-piece The Flatliners are really fucking mad on *SafeSide Suicide*. They're mad at the man ("Fight For Yourself," "Not One Of Them"), and if you diss their band, they're mad at you ("Leave Your Name"). This angry-white-boy kvetch fest is available in several pretty colors on 12" vinyl. (EG)

Slab-O-Wax Records, PO Box 461082, San Antonio, TX 78246

♀ Fleshies / Toys That Kill, split 7"

Arnold Schwarzenegger is now the governor of California, ha ha ha? Fuck you, Fleshies are from California. That almost single-handedly redeems the entire state. Along with Toys That Kill, they currently play some of the best catchy, frantic, slop punk anywhere, as proven on this split. Call it pop punk if you must (and be wrong while missing totally the point too), but both bands have far more in common with

Reviewer Spotlight: Art Ettinger (AE)

Face To Face, *Don't Turn Away*. Until last year, I hadn't been to the Warped Tour in five years, but one of the bands, H.C.A., was staying with us, so I ended up going. I went back in 2003 and saw Face To Face, which reverted me right back to the early '90s when I was obsessed with them. *Don't Turn Away* is one of the few pop-punk albums of its era that stands the test of time. It's tight, catchy as hell and powerful in the deepest sense of the term. Songs like "Pastel," "I Want," and "You've Done Nothing," mix aggression and tenderness perfectly. Originally released on Dr. Strange, the reissue on Fat Wreck Chords is still everywhere. Their brief stint on the now-defunct major-label subsidiary Victory was a commercial failure, but 1995's *Big Choice* is hands-down the best of the '90s major-label punk albums. In the end, Face To Face survived their series of poor choices, which included the recording of a bland emo album. They're currently on an upswing. Their two most recent records are their best since *Big Choice*, and their live set once again nears the power displayed when I first saw them in late 1994.

It's cold out, but these records are hot: J Church / Storm The Tower, split; V/A, *Death to Hardcore Death to Reagan*; Solger, *MIA 1980*; Caustic Christ, *Can't Relate*; Artless, *Plugged*; Jag Offs / Four Letter Words, split.

the Germs than Blink-182. Each band contributes one snotty new classic on this picture disc. There are only 500 copies, so jump on this now or commit suicide later. (RR)

GC Records, P. O. Box 3806, Fullerton, CA 92834, www.gcrecords.com

Forever Is Forgotten – The Architecture Is Still Burning, CD

This band is tight and technical with their style of blazing guitar metal and "jud-jud" hardcore. My favorite is the enhanced video on the CD that shows my old friend Erik Stenglein in the front row getting punched and kicked by Jackie Chan wannabe chodes. (TK)

Thorp Records, P O Box 6786, Toledo, OH 43612, www.thorprecords.com

Form Of Rocket – Lumber, CD

The CD jacket unfolds to reveal a long, beautiful photo of rich, grainy wood. They've got chops, but they don't take themselves very seriously. Intensely rocking swirls disintegrate too early, and the vocals seem like an afterthought. It's all skillfully played, though, and there's even a dose of Modest Mouse-style harmonic mayhem. (DAL)

Some Records, 332 Canal Street, 2 Floor, NY, NY 10012, www.some.com

Freitas, Nik – Heavy Mellow, CD

Sounding more like Michael Penn or David Gray than his San Joaquin Valley counterparts Butterglory, Pavement or Grandaddy, Nik Freitas' sophomore release *Heavy Mellow* is a wash of pleasant guitar melodies and smart vocals. Nice piano on "Summer Hearts." (JG)

Future Farmer Recordings, 400 Brannan Street, Suite 4, San Francisco, CA 94107, www.futurefarmer.com

From Ashes Rise – Nightmares, CD

Another, absolutely blazing, hard-core release from, uh, Jade Tree. Screamed vocals, blistering tempos, dueling guitars and intensity, intensity, intensity. They're harder than labelmates Strike Anywhere, but they still retain a melodic sensibility that helps sugarcoat the brutality. *Nightmares* will leave you exhausted. (KR)

Jade Tree Records, 2310 Kennwynn Road, Wilmington, DE 19810, www.jadetree.com

Functional Blackouts, The – S/T, CD

Speedy, electrified punk from a pack of what have to be Pabst Blue Ribbon-drinking wolves. They howl, break out a xylophone for a split-moment and stomp all of the puny in their way—before they towel off and do it all over again. (SM)

Criminal IQ Records, www.criminaliq.com

Funke, Sascha – Bravo, CD

You don't have to know German or be familiar with the country's electronic music scene to appreciate Funke's latest. He is a German producer/DJ with a hankering for a funky blend of techno, trance and dance. And, when Funke does lay down a vocal track, it's in English. Ehrfürchtig! (EG)

Bpitch Control, Oranienburger Str. 91 10178 Berlin, Germany, www.bpitchcontrol.de

Fuse!, The – Breaker! Breaker!, 7"

Breaker! Breaker! is a two-song teaser by one of the hottest bands in America right now. The Fuse! don't play wimpy blues garage and are

not too artsy to steal the Wire or Gang Of Four crowd. I flipped this single over and over and couldn't decide which song ripped through my speakers more. "Breaker! Breaker!" had more attack, and the flip, "Beggars And Choosers," has more bite. You would be hard pressed to find a smarter label to release this. Who the hell is still buying singles these days, besides us smart consumers? In The Red Records knows that we are intelligent enough to buy vinyl and keep this little secret all to ourselves (until someone comps all their hard-to-find-tracks.) Witness for yourself what the fuss has been about. The Fuse! are for real, and the media are starting to catch—just make sure you can say you were there before it's hip. (EA)

In The Red Records, P O Box 50777, Los Angeles, CA 90050, www.intheredrecords.com

Fuses – Sex Crimes, 7"

It takes nerve to cover Tubeway Army featuring Gary Newman, but Fuses pulls it off with a lot of sincerity, if not much flair. Their original track, "Sex Crimes," has shadowy, surf-edged guitar lines and a tumbling tambourine that's irresistible. A titillating five minutes, like any good 7" should be. (CC)

Shit Sandwich Records 310 N. Rockwell, Chicago, IL 60618, www.shitsandwichrecords.com

Gameface – Four To Go, CD

Gameface's endless supply of singalong-style pop punk melodies may be more fun to catch live, where the band's energy would translate better. Recorded, the changes are sluggish and cautious, making most of *Four To Go*'s songs go stale a minute or two into the track. (CC)

Doghouse Records, P O Box 8946, Toledo, OH 43623, www.doghouserecords.com

GammitsMW, The / Members Of The Yellow Press – Teetering on The Edge Of Destruction, split CD

Who knew Wisconsin had so much going on? Both bands on this disc represent two sides of the punk-rock paradigm, and both play their respective styles well. The GammitsMW (MW meaning Madison, Wis., apparently) play catchy, snotty punk, while Members Of The Yellow Press play angular, artsy, groove punk. (RR)

Big Action Records, 217 East King St., Winona, MN 55987, www.bigactionrecords.com

Garland Of Hours – S/T, CD

Amy Domingues, known for playing cello for many bands, releases her own music. Backed by two members of Fugazi, Domingues presents complex, light songs with cello, piano, trumpet, guitars and various other instruments, both "real" and computerized. Her vocals are outstanding. (AE)

Arrest Records, P O Box 666, Arlington, VA 22216

Genuine – Bury The Hatchet: The Complete Genuine Discography, CD

An interesting collage of hardcore in various tones, forms, and beats, from early '80s, break-neck DC stuff to more mid-'90s NYC low-end HC. Initially a one-man project, Genuine eventually worked with different voices and lyrics from collaborating friends. That makes this worth a listen, and the art work is nice. (GBS)

State Of Grace, P O Box 8345, Berkeley, CA 94707, www.stateofgracehc.com

Get Get Go / Archeopteryx – split, CDEP

All these frantic guitar/drum combo bands make me want to learn slap bass that much more. Get Get Go are a little more chaotic, screechy and annoying. Archeopteryx is somewhat more hardcore-sounding, and harder to pronounce. I'm sure both bands would be entertaining live, but Bootsy might say, "Uh, where's the bass bottom, bobble?" (NS)

Pandacide, P O Box 2774, Petaluma, CA 94952, www.pandacide.com

Ghost Orchids – The King Is Dead, CD

This is a bit too much on the synth/goth tip for me, but it's totally danceable for your goth favorites like "pulling taffy" and "release the bat." From what I gather, Davey Havoc (AFI) would probably love this record. (DM)

Prince House Records, P O Box 410353, San Francisco, CA 94141, www.princehouserecords.com

Girl Trouble – The Illusion Of Excitement, CD

Good ol' bump and grind pub rock with a tinge of drag-strip guitar leads. (GBS)

Wig Out Records, P O Box 44633, Tacoma, WA 98444

Girls Are Short – Early North American, CD

This male Canadian duo have created an impressive album loaded with charming dance-beats, original constructions and a unique vibe that speaks of nothing but itself. The songs vary from roller-rink-groovy to experimentally chic, but without the silly pretension that often accompanies the two. This is not music for people in the know, but rather for people who simply want something pleasant out of life. The album's guest vocalists include several females with appropriately sincere voices that speak or rap more than actually shatter the windows. Groundbreaking tracks include "Sunshine" and "Beautiful Yourself" (which carries a hidden track around minute six). (SP)

Upper Class Records, no contact information provided

Glasseater – Everything Is Beautiful When You Don't Look Down, CD

Definitely a SoCal sound here. Great song intros get a little watered down by weaker vocals and adolescent lyrics, but the intentions are respectable if not a little amateurish. I can actually see a lot of younger kids really getting into this stuff. Vibrant and kicking. (SP)

Victory Records, 356 North Justine, Suite 504, Chicago, IL 60657, www.victoryrecords.com

Gossip, The – Undead In NYC, CD

"So we know that there's a bunch of garage rock bullshit goin' on right now," says Gossip's singer, Beth Ditto, in her lilting Arkansas drawl. "So, for the record, Gossip are not garage rock. We're punk, thank you." *Undead In NYC* is definitive proof, in case their first three LPs hadn't hit that home. This live recording captures the heat and energy of Gossip's live performances where feet stomp, hips sway, and sweat flies off heads tossing left and right. Only Beth Ditto's raspy, raw rock 'n' roll holler could match the swagger of Nathan Howdeschell's (a.k.a. Brace Paine) fierce, blues-based guitar lines and Kathy Mendonca's primal drumbeats—creating a rhythm that's all about the blood flow pump-

Reviewer Spotlight: Erica Gallagher (EG)

I Can't Be Satisfied: Early American Blues Singers: Vol. 1 (Yazoo) Early musical recordings can pluck you from McWorld, with all of its friendsters, fast food and file sharing, to a time when people met face to face, ate food grown in their garden and whose entertainment system was a phonograph. Faced with volatile, fast-paced lifestyles, Americans often fantasize about simpler times. The reality is that those "simpler" times were a struggle for many of the country's women and minorities. In the 1920s, one of many hedonistic decades, the capabilities and contributions of American black women in particular were narrowly recognized. Thanks to Yazoo Records, an awesome label that recovers early American and ethnic music, black women's blues contributions, anyway, have been given first-class treatment with *I Can't Be Satisfied: Early American Blues Singers*, a two-volume compilation of early country and city-blues singers. Volume 1, the "country" half, features long-buried performances by great early women blues singers such as Lottie Kimbrough, Mae Glover, Memphis Minnie and Bertha Lee. The beauty of this collection is not so much how it visits typical blues themes—alcoholism, poverty and infidelity—but that the pieces are told from the unique female perspective, capturing what she was going through back in those simple, yet challenging, times. Most songs are insightful, heart-wrenching solos accompanied by merely a guitar or piano. Several pieces feature intriguing dialogue with men. My picks are: "State Of Tennessee Blues," Jennie Clayton & The Memphis Jug Band; "Dead Drunk Blues," Lillian Miller; and "That Lonesome Rave," Bertha Henderson.

Get down and dusty: Blind Willie McTell: 1927-1935; Bob Marley; Birth Of A Legend; The Geraldine Fibbers, What Part Of Get Thee Gone Don't You Understand?; The Carter Family, Wildwood Flower



ing straight to your groin. The only problem is the troublesome sound-board that'll have you wanting to crank this record louder than the trouble- and reverb-heavy recording can handle. (CC)
Dim Mak Records, PO Box 348, Hollywood, CA 90078, www.dimmak.com

Good For Cows – *Less Than Or Equal To*, CD

Largely improvised, the songs of Devin Hoff and Ches Smith are incredibly difficult to evaluate. Composed of only drums and a string bass, the recordings are inventive, daring and, sadly, limited in their appeal. I suggest seeing these two play live before deciding to snag this record off the shelf. (BN)
Free Porcupine Society, 1921 Grenada Blvd. Knoxville, TN 37922

Grand Buffet – *Cigarette Beach*, CD

Props to the president aside ("Do you think you could do his job?"), a great third release from these Pittsburgh hip-hop electro-maniacs. (Check out *Sparkle Classic* and *Undercover Angels* as well). A breath of fresh air in a world of emcees who take themselves way too seriously. Support this band! (DH)
Self-released, www.grandbuffet.com

Grandpaboy – *Dead Man Shake*, CD

The first of three upcoming records from Paul Westerberg, *Dead Man Shake* comes from Westerberg's rock 'n' roll alter ego, Grandpaboy. I gave 2002's double release *Stereo/Mono* the benefit of the doubt, but this hurried collection of jump-blues-flavored songs is a big disappointment. While Westerberg's sardonic humor and dry wit peppers *Dead Man Shake*, the music isn't loose; it's just thin and sloppy. Not sloppy in a swaggering, rock 'n' roll way—sloppy as in the recordings were haphazard, midnight forays into the studio done for shits and giggles. "Get A Move On" has that great, one-chord swagger that has become Westerberg's calling card, but tracks like "Dead Man Shake" and "O.D. Blues" are just poor blues used as filler. *Dead Man Shake* could've worked as a low-key, limited release collection for die-hard Replacements fans. But trying to pass off *Dead Man Shake* as a serious, full-length record—c'mon Paul, give your fans a little more credit, not some fucking table scraps. (GBS)
Anti Records, 2798 Sunset Boulevard, Los Angeles, CA 90026, www.anti.com

Great Redneck Hope, The – 'Splosion!, CD

Another insane band from what my friend Mike calls the "Seth Putnam School Of Song Titles." Sloppily recorded technical hardcore that leaves a bit to be desired in the songwriting department. There's some good stuff here, but it doesn't really knock the wind out of me. (DH)
Thinker Thought Records, 1002 Devonshire Rd, Washington DC 20571, www.thinkertwotright.com

Grey AM – *Breathe On Your Own Time*, CDEP

Post-hardcore with a tinge of pop. They've played with bands ranging from Hatebreed to The Promise Ring, and somewhere in between is Grey AM with their anonymous sound in a bit of a limbo. The second half of the EP is where it's at, where their sound becomes more solid and distinctive. (AA)
One Day Savior Recordings, PO Box 372, Williston Park, NY 11596, www.onedaysavior.com

Reviewer Spotlight: Melissa Geils (MG)

TONES ON TAIL, *The Album Pop*. Bauhaus guitarist Daniel Ash originally started this band as a side project and as a way to explore other styles of musical expression, but Tones On Tail eventually became somewhat of a path from the dark, gothic Bauhaus and the post-Bauhaus, slightly cheesy Love And Rockets. Drummer Kevin Haskins joined the band as well, and they released *Pop* in 1984. It's a perfect post-Bauhaus record, despite its inherent weirdness. They took on a wide range of styles and genre exploration, but a few common threads (continuously throbbing rhythm sections, the slow and quiet darkness of the melodies, etc.) easily pull each song together under a common theme. The most notable track on this record is the dancefloor hit "Go!," a pulsing, rhythmic treasure with an absolutely perfect bassline and the simple, yet erratic, singalong vocals. "Christian Says" is a gothic dance song as well, but with an industrial edge, keeping it somewhere between Ministry and the Sisters Of Mercy. The opening track, "Twist," is a hilarious beachcomber, surf-tinged pop song slowed down about 100 paces to a freakish beach soundtrack. They explore more territory with songs like "Rain," in which they stretch out loops and synth sounds to create strange soundscapes. Honestly, this record is worth it for "Go!" alone, but if you're into early '80s dark pop as much as I am, check it out and enjoy the whole thing.

Good listenin': The Quails, *The Song Is Love*; Outkast, *Speakerboxxx/The Love Below*; Erase Errata, *At Crystal Palace*; *Anti N.Y.* compilation; the Trojan Sugarhill box set

Hella – *Total Bugs Bunny On Wild Bass*, CDEP

What's with all the electronic farting noises? Whatever happened to a good old-fashioned juicy organic poot-poot? Creative, energetic, messy noise that probably owes royalties to the Casio corporation. Kind of like a car alarm tripping on LSD with Animal from the Muppets accompanying on skins. (DAL)
Narnack Records, 381 Broadway, Fourth Fl., Suite 3, New York, NY 10013, www.narnack-records.com

Her Space Holiday – *The Young Machines*, CD

Her Space Holiday is Marc Bianchi, who seems to be the real-life personification of his song "Tech Romance," a delicate electronic number featuring the lyric, "I'm sick of seeing you cry." That is, the gent looks as tech-savvy and boyish as the Heathcliff-version of any Devo member. That's acceptable since his gorgeous music is what a youngster with a Korg would produce from his igloo of hope and sadness. Describing Bianchi's music is like describing a snowflake: an ambiguous journey sure to fail in some respects. It's just that Her Space Holiday is frighteningly indescribable, each song an entity in itself, just as each snowflake, sinewy and fragile, is the only thing like it in the world. I might be gushing, but *The Young Machines* is a perfect record. Dreamy, frostbitten and warming up by the fire, Her Space Holiday almost beats a vacation to the netherworlds. Lovely. (SP)
Mush Records, www.dirtyloop.com

Hidden Hand, The – *Divine Propaganda*, CD

Lately I've been all over the vinyl playing on my small turntable. Listening to the *Divine Propaganda* on a Walkman with the volume turned up and the headphones held tightly has given me a greater appreciation for this CD. Singer/guitarist Scott "Wino" Weinrich has been a staple musician since the early '80s hardCore, Go-Go and Dischord scenes. He has played guitar for several influential bands like the Obsessed and St. Vitus. But this isn't your little brother's nü metal: the wah-wah pedal is rich, fuzzy and super slow; the guitar solos are just right; the bass is bottom-heavy; and the drums tribal. Hidden Hand, please don't change a thing. The songs are about God, politics and prayers. I know where they rehearse and want to stalk the practice space until their next show. (DI)
MeteoCity, PO Box 40322, Albuquerque, NM 87196, www.meteocity.com

Hint, The – *Black & White Album*, CD

Radio-ready, midtempo pop-punk that sounds like a cleaner, overproduced J Church. The introspective lyrics about relationships and girls introducing boys to Morrissey and poetry seem to go against the photos in the CD booklet of the band members each posing with handguns. Ugh. (JC)
Self-released, www.thehint.com

Himsa – *Courting Tragedy And Disaster*, 12"

The vocals and palm-muted guitar work bring out hardcore tendencies of this band, but then the solos, Swedish-styled speed picking riffs and double bass slap the shit right out of you when you hope it would happen. A modern-day crossover wet dream. (DH)
Excursion Records, PO Box 20224 Seattle, WA 98102, www.excursionrecords.com

Holden Caulfield – The Art Of Burning Bridges, CDEP

If J.D. Salinger's Holden Caulfield had been in a band, it definitely wouldn't have been a lackluster punk/hardcore quartet from West Virginia. *Catcher In The Rye* and the book's protagonist have catapulted thousands of teens into rebellion and/or therapy. This band isn't noteworthy enough to do either. (CC)

Surprise Attack Records, 887 N. 24th St., Philadelphia, PA 19130, www.surpriseattack-records.com

Holiday Rain – No Sound Like The Present, CD

A most pleasant surprise! Holiday Rain play some damn good pop with sweet vocals and tambourine shaking aplenty. The vocal harmonies and cute lyrics are to die for. Anyone who fancies the bands from the Elephant 6 roster would easily fall for Holiday Rain. Good stuff. (KM)

Serendipity Dodo, PO Box 2041, New Britain, CT 06050

Holy Sons – I Want To Live A Peaceful Life, CD

Sleepy, sad music for the low-self-esteem set. Weary rhythms finish off the entire vibe with a graceful sheen. The hastier songs offer a breather from bitter meanderings. Some wonderful lyrics, "Are people still climbing the ladders/ And falling down...." Amos' voice can be as guttural as it is fragile. (SP)

Film Guerrero, PO Box 14414, Portland, OR, 97293, www.filmguerrero.com

Honor System, The – Rise And Run, CD

With bands like Alkaline Trio and the Lawrence Arms getting nearly all of the attention, the Honor System has carved its own niche in the Chicago punk scene with their socially aware insights on life in America. Former Broadways frontman Dan Hanaway's strong vocals are both angry and refined, giving off an angry aura. The lyrics are often right-on, describing the problems facing both the social and corporate aspects of our country. The up-tempo melodies bring these stories to life with incredible precision. The two guitars battle for supremacy with well-timed exactness as the bass provides the backbone for the intricate melodies. As a whole, the Honor System exude a mature confidence in their sound, providing sincere songs loaded with intricacies and a strong message. (BN)

Grey Flight Records, PO Box 720595, San Jose, CA 95172, www.greyflight.com

Hospitals, The – S/T, CD

Chaotic, noisy garage rock. "Bad" rock 'n' roll has been done better. Wouldn't wanna live next to their practice pad (though I doubt they use it very often). (AJ)

In The Red Records, PO Box 50777, Los Angeles, CA 90050, www.intheredrecords.com

Huge – Live At Arlene, CD

Huge plays lots of ballads that sometimes recall U2 or Pearl Jam. The singer has a good voice, and they could be the next Creed, but not my cup of coffee. (JG)

Self-released, www.planetarygroup.com

Human Condition, The – S/T, CD

Blistering hardcore with enough melody to offset the screamed vocals and the short bursts of violence. Cultured enough to draw the band

Reviewer Spotlight: Julie Gerstein (JG)

CHARLATANS UK, *Between 10th And 11th*. Amidst all this punkness, I feel the need to represent for the nerdy, limp-wristed pop listener. Most punks have at least one Heavenly record under their beds, right? Don't hate, appreciate. Sure, bands like Ride, The Stone Roses and Pale Saints paved the way for some rather horrific latter-day revivals (Oasis), but they also released a ton of great songs. One of the lesser-known Brit-pop wonders, the Charlatans UK made two amazing records in the early '90s, *Some Friendly* and *Between 10th And 11th*, the latter of which is pure "Madchester" sound. Unfortunately, by the time it came out in 1992, "Madchester" was winding down, and the Charlatans sophomore release was by and large overlooked. The fact that the band produced a record as lush as *Between 10th And 11th* without the use of samplers is remarkable and makes them something of an anomaly for the period. Whereas Ned's Atomic Dustbin and their cheap contemporaries EMF were all sample and overbearing noise, Charlatans UK exuded clarity and depth of sound. The band went on to record another seven records over the next nine years (hopping labels and rotating members), experiencing varying degrees of commercial and critical success. But *Between 10th And 11th*, with its jangly guitars, slick keyboards and cocky vocals remains a classic.

In current rotation: Slumber Party, 3, Need New Body, UFO, Her Space Holiday, The Young Machines.

some attention, this self-titled EP may just mark the coming of a new player in the hardcore game. (BN)

Coach Records, 8720 Spring Valley Lane, Indianapolis, IN 46231

Human Host / Fridge A – split, CD

Strange as it is, this is a pretty good CD. It starts slowly, and I zoned out, then all of a sudden I was singing along. "I've been out, walkin' in the street/ with my air mask and my, backpack!" Lo-fi and sloppy, they've got something goin' on. Keyboard beats with inventive garage flavor. (DAL)

Baths Of Power, 48 Glen Alpine Rd., Phoenix, MD 21131, www.geocities.com/ccsuicides

Hurricane Lamps, The – Sing Me A Song, CD

Pop rock with some good guitar playing and a couple B+ songs. At times resembles a bar band version of Tom Petty. (AJ)

www.thehurricanelamps.com

Husbands, The – Introducing The Husbands, CD

The Husbands are a three-piece female group mixing up originals with some classics of years past. The originals are typical garage rock done with some vengeance. The covers are interesting in that you have an overdone Bo Diddley track, "Cadillac," then a heart-twisting Carol King song. They have the decency to not speed up of "Will You Still Love Me Tomorrow?" (EA)

Swami Records, PO Box 620428, San Diego, CA 92162, www.swamirecords.com

I Defy – The Firing Line, CD

Seriously epic European hardcore that is as urgent as it is anemic. There's a classic Dag Nasty flavor to I Defy that leaves you wondering why it sounds so familiar. Despite the nostalgic feel, *The Firing Line* stands on its own as quality HC. (GBS)

Reflections Records, Spoorwegstraat 117, 6828 AP Arnhem, The Netherlands
www.reflectionsrecords.com

In Dying Days – After The Fire, CDEP

This Canadian hardcore/meta band is going out of business, and this is their last release. The songs are sturdy roars sure to satisfy genre fans, but without a lot of crossover appeal to non-metalcore heads. The song names are all dates and times, which I found kind of creepy in a good way. (DAL)

One Day Savior Recordings, PO Box 372, Williston Park, NY 11596-0372, www.onedaysavior.com

Information, The – I Love Trouble, CDEP

I know I say this every issue, but I fucking love this band. The Info is a fairly new, and it's rare for a first release to be so good. These guys play that style of post-punk/post-new wave that seems to be the rage in NYC. But this is Boston, and I think these guys/gals do it better. Bands like Interpol and Elefant play stuff that's more of an homage to new wave, while the Information makes a danceable blend post-punk, new wave and straight-up rock. There is a downside to this EP. It's not the hot, crunchy guitar licks, the cool synths/keyboards, pulsing rhythm section or introspective, infectious vocals. The problem is

that there are only four songs! If you live in the Boston or NYC area, catch them when you can. Otherwise we'll all have to wait for a full-length release. This one is quality, so do not hesitate. (DM)

Self-released, www.theinformation.net

Inhuman – The New Nightmare, CD

Brooklyn hardcore powerhouse Inhuman doesn't have to thank the Misfits, Samhain, Cro-Mags and Sheer Terror for shaping their sound and sentiment. But *The New Nightmare* speaks volumes of the cues Inhuman has taken from the forefathers' gothic imagery, throbbing basslines and frenzied guitar riffs. (EG)

A-F Records, PO Box 71266, Pittsburgh, PA 15216, www.a-frecords.com

Inqilab – Burning Fantasy, 7"

Inqilab brings to mind Tortoise with a funkier flare. My initial impression was that this music wouldn't be out of place in a '70s spy flick. Clever instrumentation with a flute and trumpet, also. (DH)

Morninglight Records, PO Box 202 College Park, MD 20741

International Robot – S/T, 7"

One of the best 7" I have received all year—wait, that came out wrong. Anyway, this Minneapolis three-piece (they always rock up there) gives you a rock 'n' roll lesson. With a vocalist that rivals Johnny Rotten, some cool back ups and great guitar riffs, how can you go wrong? THIS ROCKS! (BC)

Pop Riot Records, PO Box 14985, Minneapolis, MN 55414, www.popriotrecords.com

Irving – I Hope You're Feeling Better Now, CD

Pop with a rock edge and a slight twang. Not bad, really, just kind of there. Their singer's voice reminds me of Ben Lee at times, and I could see them touring with Fountains Of Wayne. (DH)

Eenie Meenie Records, PO Box 691397, Los Angeles CA 90069, www.eenieemeenie.com

Isolation Years – It's Golden CD

A well-executed ode to classic rock a la Neil Young and The Beatles. At times there is a rootsy pop feel, but tends to fall into a bit of a revival category. When you read that these lads are from Sweden, the same country that bestowed upon us The Hives and Sahara Hot Nights, you're not surprised. (AA)

Nons Records/MNW Records Group, Textilvagen 7, 120 30 Stockholm, Sweden, www.mnw.com

J Church / Storm The Tower – split, CD

Opening with a completely unexpected, blazingly fast punk-rock song, J Church catches you with your guard down. Before you start to wonder if the band has changed direction, the second track, "Ghostwriter," begins, and it's trademark J Church: undeniably catchy, smartly written pop punk with great lyrics. "Wonderful" takes it down a notch: a slow, mournful tale of lost love that has a rad, extended instrumental ending. Who else would write a song called "Mature Shower Curtains"? To know J Church is to love them. Guitarist/vocalist Lance Hahn is clearly on his game. Storm The Tower kicks starts their side with "Feeding The Filth Eater," a ferocious assault of speedy, melodic hard core. The band pummels you continually through their



The Jolenes / Logan Whitehurst and the Junior Science Club

four tracks, which are a bit longer than you'd expect for songs of this genre. This record has everything: pop punk to make you dance and sing along, then a swift kick in the ass, courtesy of *Storm The Tower*. Get this and believe. (KR)

Broken Rekids, PO Box 460402, San Francisco, CA 94146-0402, www.brokendekids.com

Jolenes, The - *Rinse And Repeat*, CD

All right girl-pop music, a la Madder Rose or Belly, outta Portland, Ore. Great for those who are nostalgic for mid-'90s rock 'n' roll—very much on the modern-rock tip. (JG)

Last Chance Records, PO Box 42396, Portland, OR 97242, www.lastchancerecords.net

Karst - *Receive The Void*, CD

Take His Hero Is Gone, subtract some talent, add worse vocals, and you have Karst. Some interesting, tribal-feeling stuff within these two songs (and hidden track), but it wasn't nearly enough to save this. Why wasn't this a 7"? (DH)

Hater Of God Records, PO Box 666 Troy, NY 12181, www.haterofgod.com

* Kelly, Paula - *The Trouble With Success Or How You Fit Into The World*
Paula Kelly (a former member of jingly outfit the Drop Nineteens) has the voice of a deliciously enchanting child dressed up in fairy wings and gossamer tights. Likewise, *The Trouble With Success* is a delightful blend of childhood innocence and a more mature affection for the innocent aspects of love and pleasure. The music is tinkly and slightly Scandinavian (i.e., the Cardigans) without ever growing stagnant or boring. This is definitely pop for the soft at heart. Kelly's lyrics also never disappoint with their sweet-and-sour undertones: "How many time must I say good-bye/ Before I start believing it for sure" from "How Many Times." Overall, Paula Kelly has won over a new fan—one who can't stop pressing the repeat button on this sensitive treasure she's created. (SP)

Kimchee Records, 6 Sagamore Road, Ipswich, MA 01938, www.kimcheerecords.com

Kicks, The - *S/T*, CD

The packaging and name of the band made me think "garage punk," but I was disappointed to find sunny, happy guitar pop. Weezer's "Buddy Holly" came to mind. Squeaky-clean production, and all the songs sound too similar to me. It was hard to make it through the whole CD. (JG)

XS Records, PO Box 120608, Nashville, TN 37212-9998, www.xsrecords.com

Kill-A-Watts / Sweet J.A.P. - split, 7"

The striking coital line art by Sweet J.A.P.'s singer creates a raunchy atmosphere for this split. Randy rockin' and a rollin', it's an interesting mix of bands with different approaches but the same upper Midwest ethos. Raw, fun and all-around great. (DAL)

Nice & Neat Records, PO Box 14177, Minneapolis, MN 55414, www.nice-neat.com

Killing, The - *What Is Yet To Come*, CD

The Killing blend the speed and scream of death metal with the chug of hardcore's rhythm with ease. But their overuse of sound-bite samples from movies and news footage to create a sinister tone is excessive and trite. (CC)

Self-released, www.thekilling.com

Reviewer Spotlight: Jason Gooder (JJG)

TOM WAITS, *Raindogs*. Why should you own this album? Where else will you hear lines like "All the donuts have names that sound like prostitutes" or "The captain is a one-armed dwarf/ he's throwing dice along the wharf/ in the land of the blind the one-eyed man is king/ so take this ring"? Tom Waits' music takes you into a magical world of seedy diners, flophouses, cheap wine, murder and broken hearts. His voice is like a white version of Howlin' Wolf scarred by cigarette smoke and booze. The music is a combination of gypsy, blues, jazz, folk, rock 'n' roll, old tin pan alley and other archaic American and international music. He occupies his own genre. Besides *Raindogs*, he has some other great albums: 1988's live *Big Time*, 1992's *Bone Machine* and 1983's *Swordfishtrumbones* being the best. *Raindogs*, along with *Swordfishtrumbones*, signaled his transition from '70s neo retro jazz crooner (a period I didn't like) to more experimental sounds and more raw-edged songs. The last two or three albums Tom Waits has released are decent, but a mere shadow of *Raindogs*. If you need an album to sing-along with when you're drunk and feel like you're face down in the gutter, this is it.

My top 5 this week: V/A, *Dirtnap Across the Northwest*; Germs, *(MIA)*; Thee Michelle Gun Elephant, *Rodeo Tandem Beat Specter*; The Violent Femmes, *S/T*; The Exploding Hearts, *Guitar Romantic*.

Kinison, The - *S/T*, CDEP

Aggressive and erratic emo-driven rawk that's an interesting hybrid of art school, deconstruction punk and early *At The Drive-In*. Good, dark melodies. (GBS)

Fearless Records, 13772 Goldenwest St. #545, Westminster, CA 92683, www.fearlessrecords.com

Kissing Tigers - *Trebuchet*, CDEP

Five songs from these future superstars. Keyboards are hip now, and the Kissing Tigers will be taking advantage soon. Fans of '80s Brit-pop mixed with their '90s Dischord will anxiously await the coming full-length. (EA)

Slowdance Records, PO Box 30375, Portland, OR 97294, www.slowdance.com

Knappen, Seth - *Leaving Sound*, CD

Recorded by Low's Alan Sparhawk, Seth Knappen's debut solo release is, not surprisingly, a perfect record for fans of pretty, understated, Low-like music. A bit Nick Drake, a bit Red House Painters, *Leaving Sound* can lull you to sleep if you let it. (JG)

Future Appletree, PO Box 191, Davenport, IA 52805-0191, www.futureappletree.com

Kudzu Wish - *Reverse Hurricane*, CD

Some of the songs start out like pleasant indie-rock ditties, but you know something is wrong. It's just a little off. Maybe it's a discordant chord somewhere in the back, or maybe the tempo seems a little nervous. Then it explodes, puncturing the pop with shards of jangly noise. (DAL)

Ernest Jenning Record Co., 68 Cheever Pl. #2, Brooklyn, NY 11231, www.ernestjenning.com

Ladykillers - *Heart Attack Machine*, CD

Generic punk rock band with faux British vocals and lyrics about drinking. If you've been feeling like your record collection doesn't have enough songs about drinking, you might want to add this to your collection. (KM)

Gale-Force Records, 1605 South Chapel Ave., Alhambra, CA 91801, www.galeforce-records.com

Ø Lawrence Arms, The - *The Greatest Story Ever Told*, CD

Much like *Apathy And Exhaustion*, *The Greatest Story Ever Told* is an album I just can't stop listening to. Some will dismiss it as just another pop-punk waste of space, but they couldn't be more wrong. Touching lyrics, perfect dual vocals and well-crafted songs go above and beyond any expectation I'd have for a "pop-punk" full-length. These three punk-rock Chicago natives seem to craft albums that are just perfect for the fall season: cold and sad, but with a bit of personal reflection and a glimmer of hope for the future. The amazing booklet (which contains song explanations and inspirations) is just another reason to go out and fucking buy this album instead of downloading it like a cheap bastard. If you're at all a fan of rock music, you will get this album right now and help this band gain their deserved return on many dues paid. (DH)

Fat Wreck Chords, PO Box 195690 San Francisco, CA 94119-3690, www.fatwreck.com

Leveling, The - *S/T*, CDEP

I was a huge fan of *Brother Inferior* before the breakup and was excited to learn their singer is in this new band. The Leveling sounds a lot

darker, heavier and faster than BF, but displays the same uncompromising vocals of Chad Malone. Eleven fucking great songs in exactly 12 minutes. Tight. (TK)

Self-released, PO Box 491, Tulsa, OK 74101

Life In Your Way - *The Sun Rises And The Sun Sets...And Still Our Time Is Endless*, CD

Yet another cheap Poison The Well knockoff, this band brings nothing new to the table in the sea of emotional hardcore bands. Melody mixed with cheap breakdowns and some singing is nothing new to this reviewer, and it's getting old. (DH)

Indiana Records, 815 Gornto Rd., Valdosta, GA 31601, www.indianarecords.com

Ø Life Of Pi - *Sunrise With Seamonsters*, CD

Remember first hearing Weezer's *Pinkerton* and being stumped before slowly appreciating the record? *Sunrise With Seamonsters* is a little bit like that. It may take a few listens before the scope of the record becomes apparent, not that I didn't enjoy this record on the first listen. With each subsequent listen, however, it got better until it finally dawned on me that there was a lot more profundity to the record than I originally thought. From the range of the vocals, to the unexpected tempo changes, subtle backing vocals and slick instrumental interludes, there is a lot to take in here—and all of it good. Each song is catchy, despite the presence of a raw, even harsh, quality rarely found on similar releases. Combining the best of Ozma and *Pinkerton*-era Weezer, *Life Of Pi* deliver an album full of singalong goodness that gets even better with time. Highly recommended. (BN)

Self-released, www.lifeofpi.com

Ø Local Oafs / Dyke Hard - *Mortal Combat*, 7"

Another incredible split 7" arrives from Sweden, with two outrageously wacky lo-fi bands each delivering six tracks. The Local Oafs sound like a sloppier early FYP and sing songs with fun, dumb titles like "Go Ahead And Clone Me" and "We Don't Want No Pin-up Girls On Our Sleeves." They have at least four other records out and are justifiably making a big name for themselves in the European underground. The queercore outfit Dyke Hard makes their debut on this split and is even better, ripping out fast garage-rock songs with gleefully vicious, ball-busting titles like "I Just Want To Choke You With My Cunt" and "Rob'n Rape A Truck Driver." Dyke Hard's snotty backing vocals are of the taunting variety, and the lead singer responds manically. I don't know what kind of U.S. distribution this split has, but it's a great record that fans of lo-fi punk *need* in their collections. (AE)

Cage Match Records c/o Sivervik, Kvarnvägen 15A, s-905 20 Umeå, Sweden, <http://tukktown.cjb.net>

Logan Whitehurst & The Junior Science Club - *Goodbye, My 4-Track*, CD

Indie-pop novelty music—once can get past that, it's 21 amazingly well-produced, well-written four-track recordings featuring a rotating cast of indie-rock all-stars. Albums recorded on four times as many tracks should sound half this good. Still, it's hard to get past songs like "Happy Noodle vs. Sad Noodle" (essentially the chorus). (RR)

Pandacide Records, PO Box 2774, Petaluma, CA 94952, www.pandacide.com

Long, P.W. – Remembered, CD

Long-time country rocker's (and former member of Mule) new solo album. Sweet and soulful alt-country/singer-songwriter fare for all you fans of Ryan Adams and Bloodshot Records and the like. This album's got everything from stripped-down guitar ditties to blue-grassy, rootsy pop tunes to countrified, bluesy, alt-rock jammers. (MG) Touch & Go Records, PO Box 25520, Chicago, IL 60625

LoveHopeAndFear – Rose, CDEP

More depressing new-school hardcore sounds for all you ego-crushed tough guys, with more crew vocal choruses that you can shake a stick at. Slowed-down tempo for extra dramatics, chugs abound, dwindling melodic breakdowns—the band plays it well, but it's typical metalcore. (MG) State Of Grace, PO Box 8345, Berkeley, CA 94707, www.stateofgrace.com

Low Skies – The Bed, CD

Pleasant grungy-type of '90s guy-rock: down-to-earth, melodic, dramatic and even serene at times. Low Skies sounds like the kind of band that could really make it big if they focused on their strong points: beautiful vocals and grave soundscapes. *The Bed* is a striking effort by a promising band. (SP)

Flameshovel Records, #276, 1658 N. Milwaukee, Chicago, IL 60647, www.flameshovel.com

Ⓜ M's, The – S/T, CDEP

Despite the fact that I'm slightly skeptical of their Strokes-like appeal, I've got to admit that the M's are pretty damn awesome. They play a slower style of rock 'n' roll with a dose of indie rock and heavy doses of T. Rex, early Bowie and Velvet Underground. There are melodic and breezy hooks, tinges of '60s pop psychedelia, struttin' guitar riffs and sweet, soulful vocals to pull everything together. The song "Break Our Bones" takes all that and even combines a playful Elephant 6-style psych-pop feel, complete with horns, adding layers of beauty to the basic drum/bass/guitar structure. Recommended listening for sure. (MG)

Brillante, PO Box 578780, Chicago, IL 60657, www.brillante.tv

Ⓜ Malefaction – Where There Is Power There Is Always Resistance, CD

Sometimes it's hard to explain why a bands stand out, especially when you hear tons of similar-sounding bands. As soon as I heard this Malefaction CD, I knew that they had that certain something that makes me want to write whole sentences for a change. Maybe it's the fact that they play quick bursts of blistering, metallic hardcore. Maybe it's their pissed off, meaningful lyrics. Maybe it's because the "M" in their name is drawn as a kick-ass sword on the cover. What I do know is most metalcore these days is bogged down in long, drawn out songs that are filled with mosh parts instead of solos. You won't find any solos here, but you won't find any filler, either. All you get are 15 tracks of angry, to-the-point metal with guitar parts that you haven't heard a million times before. But if you don't like political lyrics, you might want to stick with metal of the dragon-slaying or bloody-bowel variety. (NS)

G7 Welcoming Committee, PO Box 27006, 360 Main St. Concourse, Winnipeg, Manitoba, R3C 4T3, Canada. www.g7welcomingcommittee.com

Man Alive – Works In Progress, CD

Your basic emo-pop punk, but from Israel. I was searching the lyrics to see what it's like living there, but it's hard to separate the teen angst

from something deeper. Don't worry; it's still a billion years better than the Simple Plan. (DI)

Dying Is Deadly, PO Box 1581, Boise, ID 83701, www.dyingdeadly.com

Marvel – Heroine Tracks, 7"

A very cute and kinda cool rock 'n' roll comic action hero concept band, whose 7" even comes with action hero/band member trading cards. Four tracks of hip shakin', glammed out rock that's heavy on the guitar wank but not in an overdone way. (MG)

Black JuJu, c/o Gunnarsson, Platensgatan 5B, 582 20 Linkoping, Sweden, http://come.to/blackjuju

Matchbook Romance – Stories And Alibis, CD

Structurally flawless from start to end, Matchbook Romance doesn't follow the usual rules, choosing instead to carve its way through stereotypes and preconceptions to make an emotional record. With competing sung vocals and screamed backing vocals set against punchy guitars, expansive melodies and tales of heartbreak, I'd say they succeeded. (BN)

Epitaph Records, 2798 Sunset Blvd. Los Angeles, CA 90026, www.epitaph.com

McCoy, Mark / Telfian, Mark – split, 7"

Mark McCoy, I believe, hails from the Czech Republic and does his spoken word in his native tongue. Mark Telfian hails from NY and indulges everyone's dirty, kinky thoughts in a few short moments. Both are supplied with interesting music, and I'm surprised to hear spoken word stuff on wax. A couple of finger snaps, man. (DM)

Gloom Records, PO Box 14253 Albany, NY 12212, www.gloomrecords.com

Mean Reds – Destination Imagination, CD

These boys are kickin' up into your face all the sass-punk dirt that's lying around the back alleys of the world. They take cues from The Make Up, NY Dolls and Blood Brothers and then run with it all. Fucked up grooves and soulful licks, good for all. (MG)

True Love Records, www.trueloverecords.com

Mercury Program / Maserati – Confines Of Heat split, CDEP

Three songs from each band. The Mercury Program contribute their perfected form of instrumental, jazzy space rock, and Maserati play a similar style but with a bit more sonic experimentation with their instrumentation. Expansive, gentle and smooth without being boring at all. (MG)

Kindercore Records, PO Box 110969, Brooklyn, NY 11211, www.kindercore.com

Mercury Switch – If You Love Me . . . , CD

Blastbeats galore, chuggy mosh breakdowns, samples, a little bit of techy guitar work, stretches of slow, emotive space, mean growling, pretty singing—basically, a typical metallic hardcore record with some sensitivity and a Christian edge. And, oddly enough, a metalcore-tinged cover of Smashing Pumpkins' "Tonight Tonight." (MG)

Indianola Records, 815 Gornto Rd., Valdosta, GA 31601, www.indianolarecords.com

Mexican Blackbirds, The – Just To Spite You, CD

Garage doesn't have to be a dirty word. In the case of the Mexican Blackbirds, it doesn't paint the whole picture either. These Blackbirds

play more of a razorwire-rapped-punk-with-garage-leanings than a full-on Seeds revival anyway. This is music to start a bar fight to. (RR)

Dirtnap Records, PO Box 21249, Seattle, WA 98111, www.dirtnaprecs.com

Midwest Product – World Series Of Love, CD

File under boring IDM. *World Series Of Love* features adequate beats with dumb-as-fuck lyrics, which lessens the impact of the band's electronic prowess. (JG)

Ghostly International, 202 E. Washington, #510, Ann Arbor, MI 48104, www.ghostly.com

Million Time Winner – Writing The Broken Line, CD

This Jersey band is supposed to be influenced by both Amy Grant and All or Big Drill Car. Take my word that it's the latter, but this has a nice layout and lots of emotional lyrics. I am getting to a point where Dashboard Confessional doesn't sound so bad. (DI)

Jerk Records 801 Hillside Ave, Middletown, NJ 07748, www.jerkrecords.com

Mindfield – Be-low, CD

Mindfield's hard-driving punk melodies and tempo growl with a thunderous rhythm and metal's sharp, speedy guitar lines. But they go a little overboard with heavy-handed theatrics, like keyboard generated strings and dramatic piano, and the occasionally whiny vocals are out of place on this otherwise vicious record. (CC)

LifeForce Records, www.lifeforcerecords.com

Minnie's – Un'estate Al Freddo (Summer In The Cold), CD

Italy's Minnie's are grounded in hardcore, but the sense of harmony in the rumbling, synched drum/vocal lines reminds me of my favorite Leatherface songs. Despite the language barrier, the guttural charge of the music communicates a message of disillusionment and isolation that is definitely not lost in the translation. (CC)

Heartfelt Records, Via Mataga 20143, Milano, Italy, www.heartfelt.it

Ⓜ Mischief Brew – Bakenal, CD

Have a drink with my new friend Erik. Mr. Petersen and I have all of these pints to get through, and there are only the two of us. My new friend's got a head full of some hella good stories. He's got an attitude and, even though I've never seen his bare arms, I can only picture them inked up like a wedding reception guest book, only with daggers in place of signatures. When he pulls his guitar up onto his lap and plays "Roll Me Through The Gates Of Hell," that's when it gets special. You won't want him going to hell without you. He makes it sound like the place where all the best fun is. He's been there. The rest of us have just heard about it, as in these five amazingly written songs. I say we check the place out. (SM)

Fistolo Records, PO Box 2836, Upper Darby, PA 19082, www.fistolo.com

Miss Universum – Selfelected, CD

A Swedish mom's answer to Le Tigre, Miss Universum is all poppy beats and no bite. An unintentionally hilarious song about sex, "Fertilize" features the lyrics, "Mister Sexy take me for a ride/ I need your semen right away/ I need your semen to be multiplied." Fun stuff for the dancing feminist set. (JG)

NONS Records, www.missuniversum.nu

Modern Machines – Thwap!, CD

Wisconsin. I miss this scene so much. There are hardly any clubs embrac-

Reviewer Spotlight: Dave Hofer (DH)

METALLICA, ...And Justice for All. Most would consider *Master Of Puppets* to be Metallica's landmark record, but after many relaxed summer nights drinking beer in a friend's garage and listening to old metal tapes, it's been decided that this is the definitive Metallica album. The main focus of the record is in fact justice (more specifically the unfair side of life), and you know it stems from grief over the loss of friend and second bass player Cliff Burton about two years prior to the recording of this LP. The hazing that Jason Newsted received upon joining the band is no secret and even shows itself in the bass-less mix of the album. *Justice* immediately takes off with "Blackened" and never lets you catch your breath. Even the slower songs like "Harvester Of Sorrow" ante up an intensity that you can't quite put your finger on. This is what happens, ladies and gentlemen, when Misfits and Life Sentence fans write a flawless metal album, devoid of songs that clock in under 5:12 or are at all predictable. Aside from all of that, *Justice* contains what was Metallica's first single, "One," arguably one of the weaker songs on the record. It just doesn't stand up to the thrashings that "The Shortest Straw" and "Dyers Eve" beat into your psyche. For anyone that needs something fucking heavy or just an album that won't let you down over the course of an hour and five minutes, this is it. Highly underrated and still very much available.



ing the large amount of punk bands, so almost every show I remember going to as a kid was held in a basement. With a song like "We're A Basement Band," how could I help getting a little nostalgic? The Modern Machines have been accurately compared to The Replacements, Husker Du and early Lemonheads. They bring back to life a style of music that most people forgot existed (or at least thought would never exist again) and do it so well that you swear you were hearing it for the first time. Their Midwest-sounding songs are so consistently well written that this release no doubt will be considered a classic. Not only is the music amazing, but they rock the fuckin' house when they play live. You now have a chance to be a part of punk-rock history by seeing these guys before they go the way of the bands mentioned above, or you will be kicking yourself for not taking my advice. (TK)

New Disorder Records, 115 Bartlett St, San Francisco, CA 94110, www.newdisorder.com

Modey Lemon, The – Thunder + Lightning, CD

This Pittsburgh band is louder and heavier than your band, so there. You can even play this at a low volume, and it will still give you a herniated disc. Like the MC5 punching out Black Sabbath in a 1970s Steelers game, this is tough. (BC)

Birdman Records, PO Box 50771, LA, CA 90050, www.birdmanrecords.com

Moomaw Collective, The – S/T, CD

This collection of mostly acoustic songs is agile and sweet, but predictable in its quiet nature, soft vocal melodies and subtle pop sensibilities. Nothing new in acoustic guitar-based music, but still enjoyable for a cold, hushed night at home. (CC)

Revelation Records, PO Box 5252, Huntington Beach, CA 92615, www.revelationrecords.com

Morbid Angel – Heretic, CD

Except for *Blessed Are The Sick*, every one of Morbid Angel's albums has taken me a listen or two before I recognize its genius (save for 2000's *Gateways To Annihilation*, which I still don't understand). With the loss of sometimes second guitarist Eric Rutan to Hate Eternal, mastermind Trey Azagthoth has smashed a triple down the third-base line. Not quite a home run, but much better than the sacrifice fly that *Gateways* was. *Heretic* impressed me right from the get-go because it goes for the throat immediately and doesn't let go until about two-thirds of the way through. There, the record turns "experimental," much like *Formulas Fatal To The Flesh* did in 1998. Why they can't just integrate these parts throughout the album is beyond me, but maybe they're making it easier for us to skip the bullshit. Tons of speed, blasts and crazy riffs have set my nerves at ease after many years of nervous anticipation. (DH)

Earache Records, 43 West 38th St, Second Floor, New York, NY 10018, www.earache.com

Morgan Storm – S/T, CDEP

This is the only release from a now-defunct band that rocked. A post-hXc female fronted band, Morgan Storm played pretty progressive with the stop/start parts and the screaming backing vocals and what not. Similar to Ashes back in the day. It's too bad because MS is gone. (DM)

BC Records, 45 Lincoln Ave. Tuckahoe, NY 10707, www.bcrecs.com

Reviewer Spotlight: Don Irwin (DI)

TROUBLE FUNK, *Live* and *Early Singles*. Go-Go is Washington DC, and Go-Go is this totally super-percussive musical form of expression that will make you dance. Punk-rock kids grow up listening to it on the streets, seeing vendors selling it from their stalls or car trunks and DJs playing it on commercial radio. Once people move away from DC, Go-Go withdrawal is one of the toughest things to kick. Trouble Funk (or simply Trouble) come out swinging on 1981's *Live*, with just four tracks labeled A through D. Check out Track B, with a version of "Drop The Bomb." *Early Singles*, also from 1981, will totally make you shake your thang the most, especially "TF Express." "Super Grit" is also a great song, but Go-Go is about percussion. The one song that gets under my skin is "Latin Funk," with its combination of too much cow bell, quirky horn arrangement and bad Spanish lyrics. That said, seven of the eight songs will have you dancing nonstop. These two records include liner notes by Henry Rollins and Johnny Temple of Girls Against Boys. These two best known recordings, released seven years ago on American, might be a hard/expensive to find. *Live* is most sought out and runs about \$39, while you can find the Trouble Funk *Early Singles* for \$9 on Amazon. I suspect people around the country can find many bargains in used CD bins in their local record stores.

Now playing: The Channels, *Demo*; Lungfish, *Love Is Love*; Dido, *Life For Rent*; The Hidden Hand, *Divine Propaganda*; and Colin McPhee *Roots Of Gamelan Bali 1928*, *New York 1941*.

the Modey Lemon / the New Breed

Mystery Girls – Circles In The Sand, 7"

About what you'd expect from a band named after a NY Dolls song. "Circles In The Sand" is sleazy r'n'r with hot licks, wah-wah guitar leads, and yeah yeahs, while "That's What I Said" is a reverb-heavy blues stomper. Solid little rock 'n' roll record. (JC)

In The Red Records, PO Box 50771, Los Angeles, CA 90050, www.intheredrecords.com

Neat Stripes – The End Of That, CD

Blues-tinged rock with a heavy emphasis on swingy guitar melodies from Athens, Ga. Singer Paul Walkers (no relationship to crappy *Fast And The Furious* star Paul Walker) scratchy vocals add a nice texture to what might otherwise be standard bluesy fair. (JG)

Tell Me Later Records, PO Box 572, Athens, GA 30603, www.tellmelafterrecords.com

Nebula – Atomic Ritual, CD

Nebula's stony guitar-driven jams will, undoubtedly, remind some listeners of Fu Manchu. Rightfully so, considering 2/3 of this trio's members, guitarist/vocalist Eddie Glass and drummer Ruben Romano, served time in The Fu. The band's not doing anything on this album that they haven't done on their four previous releases, but the riffs are all a bit better—and with these guys, it's all about the riffs. Glass' Hendrix-soaked wah-wah guitar leads are all over this album. Psycho-delic, but not frilly. Use caution when operating a motor vehicle while under the influence of Nebula. It's, literally, driving music—stuff that makes you wanna take those sharp left turns just a tad too fast. (AJ)

Liquor and Poker Music, 2323 W. El Segundo Blvd., Hawthorne, CA 90250, www.liquorandpokermusic.com

Need New Body – UFO, CD

Need New Body combine punk, folk, electroclash, new/no wave and world music with qualities of bands like (early) Beck, Atom and Devo, but they don't sound like any of these acts at all. It's all experimental, and it's all catchy as hell. (DM)

File 13 Records, PO Box 804868 Chicago, IL 60680, www.file-13.com

Network, The – Money Money 2020, CD + DVD

Uh oh. It's one of those bands with a fake bio and members who always wear weird masks. Surprisingly, this is pretty good. Total new wave dance stuff with keyboards, dancey beats and songs about robots. Any '80s music fan would be happy to get this. (KM)

Adeline Records, 5245 College Ave. #318, Oakland, CA 94607, www.adelinerecords.net

New Bethel – Inside The Blue Vera, CDEP

New Bethel serves sometimes energetic, sometimes melancholy pop-rock, Mates of State/Rainer Maria-style, via boy/girl vocals, fuzzed-out guitars and organs. There are a few strong instrumentals, too. (EG)

Kittridge Records, www.kittnet.com

New Breed, The – Port City Rebels, CD

These Canadian boys play punk rock, pure and simple—except that they have a couple of songs where a mandolin replaces the guitar. Simple songs meant to sing along with and drink to in the pub. Nothing more, nothing less. (KM)

Thorp Records, PO Box 6786 Toledo, OH 43612, www.thorprecords.com

New Mexican Disaster Squad – S/T, CD

Aggressive, melodic hardcore sounding straight out of DC circa 1985. They mix up the tempos between fast and less-fast with great effect, with an unlimited arsenal of heavy riffs and mosh parts in just the right places. Impassioned vocals with shouted backups and the occasional "woah-woah" make this a keeper. (JC)

A-F records, PO Box 71266, Pittsburgh, PA 15213, www.a-frecords.com

No Retreat – Pray For Peace, CD

Decent mosh metal with rap-style vocals at times. Songs about their crew, struggles and hatred. Cathartic tough guy music. (NS)

Da Core Records, 4407 Bowes Ave., West Mifflin, PA 15122, www.da-core.com

90 Day Men – Too Late Or Too Dead + 2, CDEP

Melancholic whine-rock, in the vein of the tail end of G'N'R's epic monstrosity "November Rain." Go write in your gratitude journal. (JG)

Southern Records, PO Box 577375, Chicago, IL, 60657, www.southern.com

93 Million Miles – S/T, CD

Emo guitar rock with a rough edge. Most emo stuff is a little too whiney for me, but this isn't so self-pitying and has good variation between songs. I actually wanted more when it ended. (JJG)

Simba recordings, P.O. Box 5232 Huntington Beach, CA 92615, www.simbarecordings.com

Nothing Famous – S/T, CD

Cheapskate records are so cheap they didn't even provide their address on this record. Where are we to order this generic piece of mid-'90s pop-core? (EA)

Cheapskate Records, 297 Stoddard Place, Schenectady, NY 12303, <http://cheapskaterecords.cjb.net>

Of Death – Build A Bridge And Get Over It, CDEP

Yet another manic, thrashy record weakened by shtick vocals. In this case, the shtick of choice is a repeated vocal squeal most similar to a circular saw cutting 2x4s. Otherwise, the music is well-played, technical, spazzy thrash with the occasional thudded out breakdown. The clear, no-frills production fits it perfectly. (RR)

Alone Records, PO Box 3019, Oswego, NY 13126, www.alonerecords.com

On The Might Of Princes – Sirens, CD

They definitely deliver the most sorrowful and brooding song called "Go Fuck Yrself" in punk history. This oddly named, fairly innovative group delivers wrenchingly earnest hardcore epics that are all over the place but coalesce at times into some pretty powful moments. (DAL)

Revelation Records, PO Box 5252, Huntington Beach, CA 92615-5252, www.revelationrecords.com

One Of Many – S/T, CDEP

Energetic, high-gain pop punk about girls that rings of early '90s Fat Wreck bands, One Of Many have some accomplished harmonies, despite the generic song structures. (GBS)

Nonexistent Records, no contact information provided

Operation Latte Thunder / Are You Fucking Serious? – The Kitchen Split, 7"

The Kitchen Split contains eight songs in 11 minutes and nine seconds of Richmond hardcore. The songs have funny titles, but I wasn't able to keep up with the lyrics. Don't let that stop you. Stick with Richmond punk bands; they won't let you down. (DI)

Mis En Place, PO Box 7195, Richmond, VA 23221

Over And Out – S/T, CDEP

I am trying to figure out if sXe kids taken advantage of more than other people, or if the fear of taking drugs keeps them focused on how badly they have been treated. These alienated young gentlemen play standardized sXe hardcore and shout about their horrible post-pubescent lives. (TK)

Stab And Kill Records, PO Box 52084, Boston, MA 02205, www.stabandkill.com

Parkhurst – S/T, CD

Colin from Mustard Plug has got himself a new punk band. In the likes of good Midwestern melodic punk, Parkhurst delivers the goods on their debut CD. They have a melodic but rough sound that will take you back to the early '90s, before punk got too commercial. (BC)

Self-released, www.parkhurstonline.com

Pearls & Brass – S/T, CD

Old is new again every several years. These 10 songs are electrified answers to the Delta Blues. As a result, Pearls & Brass sound as if they'd fit right in with some of the biggest bands from the late '60s and early '70s. (RR)

Doppelganger Records, 803 Saint John St., Allentown, PA 18103, www.doppelganger-records.com

Pennywise – From The Ashes, CD

There are a few good singalong punk tunes on this record, but it mostly stirs up ambivalence. I don't mean to piss on what's surely a favorite among this publication's demographic, but it's too rigid for my tastes. I'd probably dig it if I were some teenage skater brat from Cali. (AJ)

Epitaph, 2798 Sunset Blvd., Los Angeles, CA 90026, www.epitaph.com

Phantom Limbs, The – Displacement, CD

Here is the perfect soundtrack to a gothic carnival full of shady rockers on a Halloween night—if only such a perfect setting existed. But this record will suffice as a suitable replacement for my dream-world fantasies for now. The Phantom Limbs keep basic garage rock and early punk-rock elements at their musical core, but they add a smattering of early '90s darkwave/gothpunk a la Christian Death, plus a delightfully creepy keyboard sound, to keep me feelin' it like a punk rock Elvira. They're sassy. They're a little scary. They're playing danceable punk/synthpunk without getting all Duran Duran on your ass. It's just straight up goth-punk-n-roll with hauntingly carnivalesque organ sounds to sweep everything together. And it's a perfect combo. (MG)

Alternative Tentacles Records, PO Box 419092, San Francisco, CA 94141, www.alternativetentacles.com

Phosphorescent – A Hundred Times Or More, CD

This amazing recording from Athens, Ga., is Matthew Houck playing quiet, sparse bluesy and folksy songs in the vain of Smog or Neil Young. There have been a lot of moody records like this lately, but this one brings you right up close and into the recording studio with the musicians. (DI)

Warm Electronic Recordings, PO Box 1423, Athens, GA 30603, www.thewarmsupercomputer.com

Pia Fraus – Plastilina, CDEP

Estonian art-pop confections that drift off into droning. Imagine if Stereolab had a powerful guitar presence and a tap dancer going to work on the effects pedal. Somehow it evokes the high fashion, pop-culture-saturated melancholy of *Lost In The Translation*, even though it's a little more spunky than that film's soundtrack. (DAL)

Clairecords, 1812 J St., Sacramento, CA 95814, www.clairerecords.com

Pinebender – The High Price Of Living Too Long With A Single Dream, CD

Chicago's Pinebender has a reputation for two things: volume and length. No, seriously, *really* loud live shows and songs upwards of 12 minutes long. This, their second record, sees the band further refining the sound they refer to as "the drudge": deliberately (i.e., slowly) paced, ferocious guitar assaults with plodding drums of the Shellac variety. The album practically begs to be played loudly, and with the shortest song clocking in at 5:13 (the longest 7:21), Pinebender is up to their usual tricks. The three-piece consists of two guitars and drums, but this ain't Sleater-Kinney. One of the guitars is a baritone, and they use funky tunings, so most of the time you could swear you hear a bass. Despite the loudness, these songs are inherently somber, the perfect soundtrack to just sitting and zoning out. They're not a band for ADD sufferers, as the long, dramatic and subtle songs require a certain amount of patience. If you stick around, you'll be handsomely rewarded. (KR)

Lovitt Records, PO Box 248, Arlington, VA 22210-9998, www.lovitt.com

Pinhead Gunpowder – Compulsive Disclosure, CD

Carry The Banner is still one of my favorite albums, and it's good to hear the familiar thick guitars and dual vocals resonate. Billy Joe, Aaron Cometbus and company are back with another batch of fresh material that contains the raw edge and urgency that Green Day sadly lost. (BN)

Lookout! Records, 3264 Adeline St. Berkeley, CA 94703, www.lookoutrecords.com

Pink Swords – One Night High, CD

Guitar cock rock is back with a motherfuckin' vengeance with the Pink Swords. Twenty minutes of this is all most can take, whether live or recorded. The Pink Swords did a smart thing here by avoiding filler on the disc. Instead we get blasted and spewed upon with the memories of the New Bomb Turks or the Motards at their finest. The vocals are very upfront and harsh, but you want to spit beer and sing along. This Austin five-piece really grabs your attention and just asks you to fuck with them. Few records have reminded me of the great garage explosion of the mid/late '90s. The Pink Swords and their debut rocker may go down as one of the best since. (EA)

Mortville Records, PO Box 4263, Austin, TX 78765, www.mortvillerecords.com

Reviewer Spotlight: Ari Joffe (AJ)

TAD, *Salt Lick/God's Balls*. The music on TAD's first two albums, *God's Balls* (1989) and *Salt Lick* (1990)—packaged together on one CD—defies easy genre classification, though some folks will, obviously, dub it "grunge" because of the whole Seattle/Sub Pop connection. Too ominous and slow to be punk, yet too noisy and sloppy to be doom, this is just dirty, sweaty, stoned rock 'n' roll at its best. Tunes such as "Cyanide Bath" and "Axe To Grind" have these misshapen, almost ass-backwards, song structures that, thanks to the obtusely funky rhythm section of bassist Kurt Danielson and drummer Steve Wied, remain anchored together enough to produce an unconscious head-nodding reaction. In fact, the mark of this band's greatness was their ability to be innovative while playing "big riff" rock. Check the stripper beat Wied pumps against the metallic riff of "Wood Goblins" or Tad Doyle's vocal cadence and C.B. radio slang during "Sex God Misssy." (You can't tell what he's ranting about half the time, but Doyle sounds earnestly pissed and distressed.) Plus there's "Helot," the band's sonic recipe for an intense psychedelic trip. TAD's subsequent releases all had their merits (especially *Live Alien Broadcasts*), but, like many groups, their initial albums had that certain something that made them truly exceptional. There will probably be those music enthusiasts who'll hear this stuff and consider it a bunch of nonmelodic, out-dated bunk. But they're fuckin' sissies.

I've recently been listening to a lot of: Brujeria, The Cramps, The Jesus And Mary Chain, Merle Haggard and Hank III's *Assjack* bootlegs.



Pistol For Ringo – Solid State Neo-Hedonist, CD

The only person that is allowed to sound like Prince is Prince himself. I didn't care for this. If you are into '80s sounding electro-pop crap, you might like it. I just thought this style was overdone 15 years ago. (TK)

Aeronaut Records, PO Box 361432, Los Angeles, CA 90036, www.pistolforringo.com

Plan B – Picturesque, CD

Another young East Coast melodic-punk band. What sets this band apart from the rest? Well, they are very good, but yeah, there are a million bands out there doing this. (BC)

Dirty Work Records, 61 Weston St. Wilbraham, MA 01095, www.cheapskaterecords.cjb.net

⊕ +/- – You Are Here, CD

Plus/Minus' second full-length finds the band still deciding who they are. Their self-titled debut record (released last year) found James Baluyut and Patrick Ramos steering clear of the powerful indie rock of their other band, Versus. They explored delicate, airy, electronic songs nearly free from rock elements. Rock became more of a presence on an EP they released this year and in their live set—a sound very similar to Versus. Plus/Minus' duality is reflected on *You Are Here*; the opener, "Ventriloquist," has a dance beat beneath indie-sounding guitar. It then segues into mellow, electronic song. But track three sounds like a Versus song, no electronica to speak of. Things get mellow again quickly, though, and the album bounces back and forth like this the whole time. Plus/Minus are still finding themselves; I suspect they'll blend their two personalities well in the future. In the meantime, *You Are Here* is an enjoyable, if somewhat schizophrenic. (KR)

Teenbeat Records, PO Box 3265, Arlington, VA 22203, www.teenbeat.net

Potomac Accord, The – In One-Hundred Years The Prize Will Be Forgotten, CD

No instrument communicates the empty, rolling sprawl of the Midwest like the piano. Whether it's intentional or just a result of the Potomac Accord's absorption of their surroundings, the piano-based ballads on this record provide a perfect soundtrack for driving through endless nothing. (RR)

First Flight, PO Box 21631, St. Louis, MO 63109, www.firstflightrecordlabel.com

Prefuse 73 – Extinguished: Outtakes, CD

In my limited experience, the rapping on electronica records is terrible. The scattering of rapping here is no exception. Otherwise, the point of 23 outtakes from an electronica album is lost on me. The few moments of focus are compelling, but with almost all tracks clocking in under 90 seconds, any momentum is quickly lost. (RR)

Warp Records, PO Box 25378, London NW5 1GL, UK, www.warprecords.com

Presley – S/T, CD

Three of the songs on this 12-song album have no title at all, which of course, means...something. Some of the experimental tracks are a little dry, but when they pick up the pace, it gets a lot better, a lot more evocative and exciting. The vocals seem a little tacked on, though. (DAL)

Self-released, 15 First St. Apt D2, Salem, MA 01970, www.presleytheband.com

Reviewer Spotlight: Tim Kuehl (TK)

THE CURE, *Three Imaginary Boys*. OK, so everyone knows who The Cure is. A few of you probably think I am pretty off-base mentioning one of the most famous "goth" bands in the world in a publication about punk. Well, first off, most of these songs were written when they were known as Easy Cure. They wrote all of them with Michael Dempsey on bass before the really "goth" bassist Simón Gallup joined the band and helped make The Cure what they are today. The Cure toured with Siouxsie And The Banshees in their early years, as well as played with bands such as Generation X and Wire, which makes them pretty punk rock in my book. The point isn't to get you to think of The Cure as a punk band; it's to make you aware that this is one damn fine, and highly underrated, album. There are several reasons this album sounds nothing like any of their other releases (except *Boys Don't Cry*, which is basically the same album plus and minus a few songs). I already mentioned their bassist. Another is that these were all written before adding keyboards, so they rely heavily on poppy, rhythmic guitar and bass lines that are a precursor to their current sound. Their style was original back in 1979, and they have continued to evolve to this day. This is by far my favorite Cure album. Give it a listen, and it might be yours, too.

On Tim's listening list: Killer Dreamer, *Tape*, Weakerthans, *Reconstruction Site*; Popular Shapes, *Bikini Style*; Poison Idea, *Pig's Last Stand*; Modern Machines, *Thwip!* (reviewed in this issue).

Pistol for Ringo / the Put Ons

when they stick to pop basics as on "He Whipped My Ass In Tennis, Then I Fucked His Ass In Bed," but this album is great fun overall. (AE)

Alternative Tentacles, PO Box 419092, San Francisco, CA 94141,
www.alternativetentacles.com

Pilotlight – Four Storey Landscapes, CD

Pilotlight plays melodic, poppy emo rock that's pretty well done, but I don't really like. It's *too* melodic, and there are too many bands like this around already. It's like eating a cake made entirely of sugary frosting. (JUG)

Outreach Records, 1182 Gravel Pike, Hereford, PA 18056, www.outreachrecords.net

Planet The, The – Physical Angel, CD

The Planet The's sound on *Physical Angel* is indeed hard to categorize, making it arguably unique, albeit not very good. But here goes: Think bipolar prog rock armed with keytar and other sonic weapons of the genre. Super-spastic vocals range from falsetto moans to mad-dening baritone mumbles. (EG)

54° 40' or Fight!, PO Box 1601, Acme, MI 49610, www.fiftyfourfourtyorfight.com

Plastic Crimewave Sound – S/T, 12"

Extra-noisy psychedelia with indiscernible vocals. Like listening to Led Zeppelin sped up three-fold. Interesting. (SP)

Self-released, 1061 North Western Avenue, Chicago, IL, 60622

⊕ Puffy AmiYumi – Nice, CD

I swear, sometimes I feel like Japanese artists have a better grasp on Western music than Americans. Shonen Knife? Check. The Boredoms? Check. Gauze? Check. Fantastic Plastic Machine? Check. Teengenerate? Check. Puffy AmiYumi's U.S. debut (their 10th album) serves up an eclectic record that keeps its foundations in all things pop. Notable for writing the theme to the Cartoon Network's *Teen Titans* series, this duo could be alluded to Bis, the eclectic pop group from the *other* overseas. Ami & Yumi keep it organic, with the synths buried under crunchy guitars in a way The Rentals played their pop card. From there, the duo shoot off dozens of tangents: from subdued arena rock, tasteful ska, energetic folk and more. Schooled in a diverse catalog of influences, each song nods toward at least three, making it difficult to pinpoint this outside of "general alternative," but maybe that's a pretty sweet place to be. (VC)

Bar None, PO Box 1704, Hoboken, NJ 07083, www.bar-none.com

Punishment – Broken But Not Dead, CD

Brutal, intense and punishing metallic hardcore. These guys do it right, but there's not much else to say about it, as I've heard it a million times before. You will like this if you're into one or more of the following: chugs, Hatebreed-style thugcore, homoerotic mosh pits, straight edge, "crews," etc. (MG)

Thor Records, PO Box 6786, Toledo, OH 43612, www.thorrecords.com

Put-Ons, The – Jack Kevorkian Gift Certificate/Kleenex, 7"

The A-side of this single is a really catchy tune, but it sounds just like The Buzzcocks. The B-side's a Billy Idol (or maybe Generation X?) cover. Guess Jello Biafra was right—"Even punks wanna go back to '77." (AJ)

Puke N Vomit Records, PO Box 3435, Fullerton, CA 92831, www.pukenvomit.cjb.net

② Quails, The – *The Song Is Love*, CD

The Quails' Y2K objectives were simple: play for their friends, have dance parties and talk about their community (queers, punks, artists, etc.) The formula stuck, and Julianna Bright (drums), Jen Smith (guitar) and Seth Lorinczi (bass) continue to share band duties on their third record. *This Song Is Love* visits familiar topics (protesting, pride, partying), but the sound refuses to settle, bouncing from new wave to erratic no wave to stripped-down punk. The band pushes the limits of both its signature female/male vocals and few simple instruments—a zest for experimentation is the crux of the band. The urgent “Change Will Come” and “Cold War” tinker with rhythms and crack vocal confines, while “The War Will Be Over When We Want It” and “Pals Have To Go” stand out as much less stimulating. Overall, *The Song Is Love* is a great moment in The Quails’ sound evolution. (EG)

Mr. Lady Records, PO Box 460956, San Francisco, CA 94146, www.mrlady.com

Rachel's – *Systems/Layers*, CD

As this music was developed as collaboration with a theater group, it is hard to get a sense of the complete work. On its own, it is a sweeping collection of chamber music with strings, keys, drums and samplings of found sounds. (RR)

Quarterstick Records, PO Box 25342, Chicago, IL 60622, www.tgrec.com

② Radiation 4 – *Wonderland*, CD

Eerie to spastic, moody to chaotic, Radiation 4 combine the genres between metal and hXc but make a whole new package. Mike Patton (Mr. Bungle, Fantomas) would be proud of the band's success at creating a new product for the listener's displeasure. If not, fuck Patton, I'm proud as all hell. This is more than exciting with its musical theatrics, moodiness and schizophrenia of their heavy (and at times weightless) metal churning. The ability of to change the frontman's singing to screaming to shouting and back again is nothing short of impressive. This will be an instant classic for fans of Dillinger Escape Plan, Buckethead, Bungle and Zappa. (DM)

Abacus Recordings, 2323 W. El Segundo Blvd. Hawthorne, CA 90250, www.abacusrecordings.com

Radio Berlin – *Glass*, CD

Radio Berlin play post-punk, European-sounding synth pop, often compared to The Cure (for good reason). Fans of '80s Brit rock will appreciate this band, and I suspect the vocals would appeal to Midwestern goth youth. (AE)

Action Driver, PO Box 610, Toledo, OH 43697, www.actiondriver.com

Ramblin' Ambassadors, The – *Avanti*, CD

Solid, dragstrip rock 'n' roll—meaning surf music that has a decidedly western flavor and a tendency to lean toward steady, bluesy guitar playing and garage-heavy beats rather than quick riffs. Greasers and Hootenanny attendees should definitely pay this some attention. (GBS)

Mint Records, Inc., PO Box 3613, Vancouver, BC V6B 396, www.mintrecs.com

Razor Crusade – *Are You Wired?*, CDEP

It seems like another band has picked up the torch where Refused left it after *The Shape Of Punk To Come*. Catchy and somewhat melodic hardcore with well-written lyrics and great energy. It's short and sweet, but left me wanting more. (TK)

Reflections Records, Spoorwegstraat 117 6828 AP, Arnhem, The Netherlands, www.reflectionsrecords.com

Reactionary 3 – S/T, 7"

Reactionary 3 throws down frenzied song structures and insistent, punk/hardcore vocals, but lyrically, an overall apathetic, “whatever” attitude kills the mood. (EG)

Hotsauce Records/Obscurist Press, PO Box 13077, Gainesville, FL 32604, obscurist@hotmail.com

Resistoleros, The – *Rock 'N' Roll Napalm*, CD

Jump back to the sounds of Detroit, the Stooges, the MC5, and the Resistoleros in the opening slot. Thirteen tracks of straight-up rock 'n' roll led by the old lead vocalist of Fang. If there weren't a million other bands doing this sound as well, The Resistoleros would be kings. (EA)

Steel Cage Records, PO Box 29247, Philadelphia, PA 19125, www.stealcagerecords.com

② Respira – *A Still Silhouette*, CD

Despite my firm personal pledge never, ever to like a record with “silhouette” in the title, this is actually pretty tight. Even more frustrating is the completely illegible CD with its tiny white-on-yellow print. But I will forgive even that. Granted, I am saintly person, but it is mostly a testament to their sad, subtle, well-constructed rock laments. They are saved by their unpredictability, which takes a song that starts off like a fairly standard emo mopefest and then, when it is supposed to go from soft to loud, it rocks out with a hook that's almost funky. Another song breaks up with quiet and loud parts with a bridge full of jangly, scratchy, buoyant guitar work that sounds totally original. They take the trite and typical alternative rock format and attack it, creating a really unique sound. (DAL)

Exotic Fever Records, PO Box 297, College Park, MD 20741-0297, www.exoticfever.com

Resident II – *Wings Beneath The Sills*, CDEP

This second part of a three-EP series presents six tracks of IDM that are soothing yet still emanating a rough, nervous energy in their avant hip-hop beats with live musicianship (flutes/horns) and spoken/sung vocals. It's as if OMD returned from the '80s and wanted to go for the laid-back electronic crowd. (DM)

Mixx Tape Ltd., 2144 W. Farragut Ave Chicago, IL 60625, mixxtape@attbi.com

② Rev, Martin – *To Live*, CD

In the late 1970s, a burgeoning NYC art/punk scene produced a duo called Suicide, who would become one of the most influential electronic/experimental/punk projects ever. Martin Rev was Suicide's instrumentalist, and his latest solo album is a testament to his legacy. The record begins with some throbbing, minimal industrial tracks, recalling the old days of Wax Trax, but keeping a sense of Suicide's more gentle and fluid songs. Hard, linear beats are overblown by dark, pulsing, Ministry-esque guitar chops and Rev's ghostly vocals.

“Gutter Rock” is a modern construction of early Barry White orchestral soul and Donna Summer disco, gently pierced with out-of-place sounds and a slightly creepy vocal track. Other songs get more experimental, with layers of noise, loops, heavy synths and even the occasional techno beat. Then there are some tracks that almost reach pop terrain, but with a gothy twist. This record is not only for Suicide/electronic music fans, but also for those who have an interest in the deconstruction of standard arrangements rather than the construction of standard songs. (MG)

File 13 Records, PO Box 804868, Chicago, IL 60680, www.file-13.com

② Ripcordz – *What If They Held A Revolution and Nobody Came?*, CD

Even though they've been around since 1980, French Canada's Ripcordz haven't made it to many of our punk radar screens. Listening to this divine album, I'm kicking myself for what I've been missing all these years. While not straying too far from familiar streetpunk paths, Ripcordz toss in a giant dash of rockabilly, giving them an edge over their often monotonous counterparts. Lyrically, this album deals with many of the obvious issues of our time, but the writing level soars for a streetpunk band. Song highlights include “Punk Rules,” “D'oh Canada” and “Weekend Punks.” Especially entertaining is the song “Freedom Fried,” which is the funniest song thus far about the “freedom fries,” anti-French bullshit that went down during the war. It's a good thing the Ripcordz are from Montreal, because Montreal is arguably the city with the best record stores in North America. It's gonna take a ton of good ones to locate this band's nine full-length albums. The Ripcordz now have a new fan, and I just might have to make the trek. (AE)

Mayday Records, 78 Rachel East Montreal, Quebec H2W 1C6, Canada, www.unionlabelgroup.com

Robot Ate Me, The – *They Ate Themselves*, CD

Experimental, sometimes brooding, pop with interesting instruments and arrangements. This is good background music for drawing, building models or cleaning your room. (JJG)

SwimSlowly Records, PO Box 712464, San Diego, CA 92171, www.swimslowly.com

RobotZen – *Alice Meets The Caterpillar*, CD

Trippy art rock that has a smooth, dark feel with seductive female vocals. I usually hate two-person bands based around computer loops and such, but this actually is damn good and infective. Give it a try. (BC)

Self-released, www.robotozen.com

Rock City Morgue – *Some Ghouls*, CD

Creepy, dirty rock 'n' roll full of long guitar solos, rock-city styling and haunted vocals that will give you shivers. With obvious gothic themes underlying the robust melodies, this is the record to play on Halloween to keep the little bastards away. (BN)

Antidote Records, 9830 W. 53rd Place, Arvada, CO 80002, www.antidoterecords.net

Rockets Red Glare – *Moonlight Diaries*, CD

Math rock slowed down and hypnotized. Rockets Red Glare, bombs bursting in air? Stink bombs maybe. (EA)

Blue Skies Turn Black, 214 Thornhill, DDO, H9G 1P7, Canada, www.blueskiesturnblack.com

Reviewer Spotlight: Dan Laidman (DAL)

SUBHUMANS, *The Day The Country Died*. This record sure slapped me around the first time I heard it. A friend put “No” on a mix tape, and it totally floored me. What punk song has ever opened better? The bass groove just grabs you and holds you in place while Dick Lucas comes in deadly calm, singing “No, I don't believe in Jesus Christ/ My mother died of cancer when I was five/ No, I don't believe in religion/ I was forced to go to church and I wasn't told why.” Then it explodes. I heard it for the first time when I was still getting into punk, and I was struck by how *serious* it was. The biggest themes in the world, the most personal life experiences, all belted out in the first few seconds of a scorching punk song. It taught me how weighty and wide-reaching punk could be. Of course, then I actually bought the record, and what else does Dick sing? “Mickey Mouse is dead/ Got kicked in the head/ 'Cause people got too serious/ They planned out what they said.” So much for serious. Serious is a killer, man. This is just a brilliant fucking record. 1982. Kick ass.

On the stereo lately is the new Pretty Girls Make Graves; Elvis Costello reissues, especially *Get Happy*; Strike Anywhere; Turbonegro; and, for whatever reason, Jawbreaker's “Ashtray Monument.”



Roy Tacomatose - S/T, CDEP

This quartet plays a sincere, indie type of down-to-earth rock with a Midwest feel. The EP, five short songs, portrays the voice of a band in its youth—indiscreet if not a bit transparent. Nonetheless, nicely conceived and worth checking out. (SP)

Initial Records, PO Box 1751, Louisville, KY 40217, www.initialrecords.com

Running From Dharma - If We Don't Speak Before The End of The World, CD

Running From Dharma's lyrics and trembling vocals are as melodramatic as their name and album title. Their post-hardcore/melodic-punk formula—quiet breakdowns that build into angst-ridden outbursts—is earnest but boring and might get more interesting if their influences varied. (CC)

C.I. Records, 739 Manor St., Lancaster, PA 17603, www.corruptedimage.com

✉ Russian Futurists, The - Let's Get Ready To Crumble, CD

Much like the real Russian Futurists, who envisioned a mechanized and technologically advanced future for inspiration, Matthew Adam Hart from the band of the same name, writes songs that are a bit avant garde but nonetheless pleasant. Sounding like a mix between The Postal Service and Her Space Holiday, Hart sings songs about weather, art and, of course, girls. The 10 songs on *Let's Get Ready To Crumble*, recorded on four-track over a two-year period, are a fine example of just how good bedroom-pop can be. (JG)

Upper Class Records, www.upperclass.org

Sadaharu - Anthem For New Sonic Warfare, CD

Herky jerky, hectic hardcore. Dueling guitars pummel and shake, the rhythm grooves and rocks out. Meanwhile the singer channels the spirit of San Diego while trying to exorcise the demons in his head (and pants). Great post-hardcore that will make your backbone slip. (NS)

CI Records, 739 Manor St., Lancaster, PA 17603, www.cirecords.com

Saddest Landscape, The - The Sound Of The Spectacle, CD

This is the stupidest band name I have seen in awhile. As the band name and cover art implied, this is a mediocre attempt at the "screamo" sound. The singer has same vocal pattern in every song. The music is standard. There's nothing exciting here. (TK)

Copter Crash, PO Box 6095, Hudson, FL 34667, www.coptercrash.com

Saosin - Translating The Name, CD

Elaborate indie rock meets hardcore on this debut EP, with its dueling vocals, precise guitars and varying melodies. I'd hate to label them as "can't miss" based on one release, but this is the best debut I've heard in a long while. (BN)

Death Do Us Part Records, 8023 Beverly Blvd #5, PO Box 440, Los Angeles, CA 90048, www.deathdouspart.net

Saturday Night Kids - S/T, 7"

These dorky-looking guys sound like they are heavily influenced by the more recent releases by The Queers, playing pop-punk with plen-

ty of woe-oh-oh's. The second side of the record is a Devil Dogs cover. The sound is pretty standard, yet Joey Ramone would be proud. (TK)

Route 13 Recordings, 1109 Prospect Ave, Wilmington, DE 19809

Scarlet Letter, The - Scattered, Smothered And Covered...The Collected Letters, CD

Brutal punk rock straight outta New Brunswick. If they gave out awards for the shortest songs, Scarlet Letter would win for its 23-second opus "Fuck You And The Jackass You Rode In On." Until they do, you'll just have to enjoy Scarlet Letter for its unassuming and catchy songs. (JG)

Hater of God, www.haterofgod.com

Schematic Of A Waking Life - Cinders And Seeds, CDEP

I think one of these guys is from Light The Fuse And Run, which doesn't really matter, but I figured it should be mentioned. This is a damn fine EP. All four songs are midtempo post-hardcore. No lyric sheet was included, because I got the "Limited Summer Tour" edition. Lucky me. (TK)

Bug Empire, PO Box 14838, Richmond, VA 23221, www.bugempire.com

Scifyer - Fair Weather Karma, CD

This reminds me of My Bloody Valentine: lots of reverb on the vocals, making them hard to understand and droney. This CD was too down-beat and unsurprising. (JG)

Clairerecords, 1812 J Street #1, Sacramento, CA 95814, www.clairerecords.com

✉ Scrog - Discography, CD

This is slow, sludgy metal from the early to mid-'90s. The press release points out this band's "introspective lyrics," but because most of the lyrics are screamed, I couldn't understand most of them. I could, however, make out this gem: "If you exist in heaven/ I offer you my life/ take it NOW! NOW! NOW!" Does this sound like melodramatic, stereotypical metal crap lyrics to you? It does to me. The music is a little better, but not much. (JG)

New Granada Records, PO Box 291044 Tampa, FL 33687-1044, www.newgranada.com

Semiautomatic - Wolfcentric, CD

This duo (Akiko and Ropstyle) create angry-cum-fun urban tunes that even feature the awesome presence of Ari Up rapping to reggae vibes. Zillion thumbs up. (SP)

Self-released, PO Box 150491, Brooklyn, NY, 11215

Sexsu Roba - Pleasure Vibrations, CD

Sexsu Roba's sensual sound is downright ticklish with its cooing vocals and hypnotic synthetic beats. Über-modern disco that's perfect for house parties or whenever your punkass wants to dance the way you shamelessly did to Michael Jackson back in the day. Don't even try lying. (CC)

Eenie Meenie Records, PO Box 691397, Los Angeles, CA 90069, www.eenieemeenie.com

Shadow Of A Great Name - Invisible Side Of A Situation, CD

Wait...what? It's that kind of sublingual state this "lo-fi orchestra" will send you into. This instrumental trio opts for creating mesmerizing, atmospheric, groove-oriented post-rock. It's peppered with a

Roy Tacomatose / Silo the Huskie

few distracting sound manipulations to complete the drug-free musical drug coma. (RR)

Self-released, www.soagn.com

Shiver - Never Too Late, CD

If you're into the West Coast punk scene (Bad Religion, the Offspring, Pennywise), you'll dig this record. While their approach isn't original, the delivery is good enough to mask that fact. Save that \$10 you'd have spent on some redundant emo record and give Shiver a chance. (BN)

Self-released, www.shiver-music.com

Shootin' Goon - Left For Dead, CDEP

Once you get past the goofy name, Shootin' Goon is merely a U.K.-based ska collective with a brassy bite and often raging punk guitars. Strong vocals with a prominent British accent give it that Two Tone sensibility. (EG)

Good Clean Fun Records, 48 Cardigan Rd., Harverfordwest, Pembrokeshire, SA61 2ON, Wales

Shotpointblank - Kill...**<Breath>**...Kill, CD

Ughhhh. Grunt. Politics. Hardcore. Big in Australia. Madball? Real loud. Hooded Sweatshirts. Guns, Skulls. Hardcore. Looks like someone really needs a hug! (EA)

Surprise Attack Records, 2601 Peach Tree Erie, PA 16508, www.surpriseattackrecords.com

Shuttlecock - Existing Bridges, CDEP

Hey, I liked Shellac's last record too, but this is a bit much. Shellac's Bob Weston recorded it, and the layout and design are also Shellac-esque. This duo still manages to tweak the formula a bit, but as a whole this EP's very reminiscent of the quieter passages of *1,000 Hurts*. (RR)

Friction Records, PO Box 6605, Grand Rapids, MI 49516, www.frictiongoods.com

Sick Of It All - Life On The Ropes, CD

Do I really need to describe what Sick Of It All sounds like? These guys have been around more than 15 years and have massively influenced hardcore. John Joseph from the Cro-Mags even lends his vocals on a song. This is another must-have record for the hardcore kids. (TK)

Fat Wreck Chords, PO Box 193690, San Francisco, CA 94119-3690, www.fatwreck.com

Sickidz - Now And Then, CD

Raw swamp-stomp from this classic Philly punkabilly outfit. The four new studio recordings sound as good as anything the Cramps have done in the past 15 years, while the four live tracks from 1980 are reverb-soaked and nasty. Hot stuff. (JC)

Steel Cage Records, PO Box 29247, Philadelphia, PA 19125, www.stealcagerecords.com

Silo The Huskie - Sons Of Columbus, CD

Once I realized this reminded me of Built To Spill, especially vocally, the connection only grew stronger as the album progressed. Not to detract from these guys, though; this is well-executed indie rock with sharp lyrics. Opener "When To Run" is a great song about the life of a workin' man. (KR)

Tiberius Records, 4280 Catalpa Drive, Independence, KY 41051, www.tiberiusrecords.com

Reviewer Spotlight: Krystle Miller (KM)

PIEBALD, *Sometimes Friends Fight*. I feel silly listing a Piebald record in my spotlight, but *Sometimes Friends Fight* is a totally different band than the Piebald many know today. In fact, if you've only heard *Venetian Blinds* or the last full-length the band released, forget what you know about these guys altogether. This record, their first full-length, showcases seven melodic, post-hardcore tunes teeming with heartfelt dual screamed/sung vocals, emotional lyrics, spazz attacks and memorable melodic guitar lines. These days the band is hardly abrasive-sounding, but this record is definitely raw and heart-wrenching. The music could stand well on its own, but the lyrics take it over the top. The goofiness of the band's last couple releases isn't present on *Friends Fight*, which is a good thing if you like your lyrics depressing and awkward, which I do. I would guess a lot of current emotional scream-fest bands are influenced by the early incarnation of Piebald, as much of this record is comparable to a number of popular scream, post-hardcore bands today, except with less metal and more pop. If you're interested, a couple of years ago the band released a two-disc compilation (*Barley Legal & All Ages*) of songs, including *Sometimes Friends Fight*, the *When Life Hands You Lemons* LP and various single, demo and comp tracks from their early years. This handy discography of sorts is worth picking up for all off Piebald's best (i.e. early) material.

Hurricane Isabel theme music: Hugs, 12"; The Vidablue, *What I Should Have Said Vol. 1; Stop It!, Self Made Maps*; The Number Twelve Looks Like You, *Put On Your Rosy Red Glasses*; Welcome to the Plague Year, demo.

Singles, The – Better Than Before, CD

The Singles play difficult-to-take artsy pop, with a too cool mentality and lots of jangle to remind you how swell the '50s and '60s were. Heavily influenced by the Beatles and Beach Boys, this album is overly contrived and unpalatable—but it does have outstanding production. (AE)

Rainbow Quartz International, 440 9th Ave., 8th Floor Room 4, New York, NY 10001, www.rainbowquartz.com

Sinaloa – Fathers And Sons, CD

I guess there must be a post-emo movement to bring back the good old days of emo, circa 1995. Anyway, this sounds like what started the pre-wimpy emo/math-rock sound a couple of years back. Kind of noisy and disjointed and yet not. (DM)

Chernobyl, 82 Montague Rd. Amherst, MA 01002, www.chernobylmedia.com

Skydiver – Origami, CD

Silky-smooth indie rock/pop with sweetness that carries on for duration of the record. Almost as if afraid of being labeled, the band covers the spectrum with songs that range in performance as much as in influence. The one constant is the overall quality of this charmer of an LP. (BN)

Self-released, www.skydivermusic.com

Skyline Awake – Fight Your Route Of Identity, CD

This band fits right into that melodic/punk/rock/emo combination that seems so popular with the kids these days. They do it really well, though their sound is so similar to Hot Water Music that it's almost plagiarism. (MG)

Rosewater Records, PO Box 30, Riverdale, MD 20738, www.rosewaterrecords.com

Sleep Comes Down – Wax Romantic, CD

Sleep Comes Down's boring melodies and monotonous vocal lines are too formulaic. But there's definite attention to song structure and a unique layering of tempos that, considering the jump they've already made from their pop-punk roots, is a glimpse at their promising evolution. Maybe next record. (CCC)

Uprising Records, PO Box 480 Laguna Beach, CA 92652, www.uprisingrecords.com

Sleeping By The Riverside – A Breath Between Battles, CD

And God floated down from His cloud and said, "Start a melodic hardcore band to tell the lost punk-rock souls about the evils of abortion, premarital sex and wearing gold religion-oriented jewelry." Later, a *Punk Planet* reviewer listened to the collection of mediocre songs and said "It is not good." (TK)

Indianola Records, 3072 Shelton Rd., Valdosta, GA 31606, www.indianolarecords.com

Slingshot Around The Moon – S/T, 7"

Shimmery Britpop with a bit of an emo bent to it, what with the singer sometimes having to scream in anguish over the loud guitars. Not bad, but not really remarkable either. (JC)

Running Riot Records, 15 Denver Road, Dartford, DA1 3LA, UK
www.runningriotrecords.co.uk

Slowride – Building A Building, CD

I like Slowride's previous efforts, but I'm not sure I like their new direction. They're growing up and leaving their upbeat pop-rock sound behind. Now they're cultivating a newer garage rock/Pixies/alt-country vibe. They still rock out occasionally, but now there are more mellow moments. It's like summer turning to fall. The leaves are nice, but I miss the cleavage. (NS)

Deep Elm, PO Box 36939, Charlotte, NC 28236, www.deepelm.com

Small Brown Bike – Nail Yourself To The Ground, CDEP

They're not going to exactly shout your ear off, but Small Brown Bike is somewhat aggressive both vocally and instrumentally on the majority of *Nail Yourself To The Ground*. The Michigan-based four-piece is a sophisticated punk-rock outfit devoted to intelligent lyrics and robust song structures. (EG)

No Idea, PO Box 14636, Gainesville, FL 32604, www.noidearecords.com

So – S/T, CD

Japanese lyrics glide over experimental soundscapes. No immediate rhythms, but a dreamy, technological sound that soothes and flinches with surprise. A really excellent thing to play when completely spaced on the floor—pretty and otherworldly. (SP)

Thrill Jockey Records, PO Box 08038, Chicago, IL 60608, www.thrilljockey.com

Sodahberk, Dwayne – Unfortunately, CD

Dylan trading his acoustic for electric changed folk music. Sweden's Dwayne Sodahberk trading his TR-909 drum machine for a 12-string electric guitar on *Unfortunately* isn't going to bring electronica to its knees, but it proves he can flex his musical muscles. Vocals often play second fiddle to samplers, synths and other noisemakers. (EG)

Tigerbeat6, PO Box 460922, San Francisco, CA 94146-0922, www.tigerbeat6.com

Something About Vampires And Sluts – I'm Not Afraid Of Sex, CD

S.A.V.S.'s grinding blend of reverb-riddled dance beats with four-on-the-floor (or on-all-fours) smut rock will turn you on to the dirtier side of bedroom dancing. As clichéd as it is, the hiccupping orgasmia of S.A.V.S.'s vocalist is exactly what's been wetting the panties of Pulp fans for over a decade. (CC)

Coptercrash Records, PO Box 6095, Hudson, FL, 34667, www.coptercrash.com

Soundtrak – S/T, CDEP

Boring mainstream pop rock. Their bio compares them to early U2. Yeah, that's pretty accurate. They suck as bad as early U2. (AJ)

Ace Fu Records, PO Box 552, NYC, NY 10009, www.acefu.com

Sparrow – S/T, CD

Lush pop music with a '60s vibe. Cheery male vocals over breezy pop with the occasional violin or cello parts. Talented enough, but as with most pop, the songs just seem too disposable. Is there anything punk about "crafting the perfect pop song"? I thought it was more about vomiting and bad haircuts. (NS)

Overcoat Recordings, 3831 N. Christiana, Chicago, IL 60618, www.overcoatrecordings.com

Sponge – For All The Drugs In The World, CD

This is the same Sponge that played Lollapalooza in the '90s. They used to be on a major label but have fallen back to the indies. If you watched MTV, then you already know this crappy band. I figured they would be gone and playing alt-country or something by now. (EA)

Idol Records, PO Box 720043, Dallas, TX 75372, www.idol-records.com

Squirtgun – Fade To Bright, CD

Pop-punk is in a state of crisis when people aren't running out in droves to check out the first new Squirtgun album in almost six years. It's not as solid as the band's two Lookout LPs, but it's still a great album. It's no surprise that the lyrics are way above average, since the singer is a big time published poet. The members of Squirtgun have been involved with so many bands that it's senseless to list them, but they're basically a super group of pop-punk pioneers. It's difficult to understand precisely why so many people involved in the punk scene maintain such disdain for pop bands, but the commercialization of pop-punk that occurred in the '90s is surely the biggest factor. Fuck all that. The kid in all of us loves pop-punk. This solid album contains 14 tracks of mid-to fast-tempo pop songs, all with catchy choruses and seamless production. The CD version is enhanced and contains two videos, one of which is animated. Several of the songs feature guest appearances from the likes of Kris Roe, Pat Termite and Justin Sane. (AE)

Honest Don's Records, PO Box 192027, San Francisco, CA 94119-2027, www.honestdons.com

Starbag – S/T, CD

The first half of this record sounds like pop, but the second half is all pedal steel and country tunes. The tempo was so slow on every song, and the songwriting wasn't interesting enough to hold my attention. (KM)

Happy Happy Birthday To Me Records, PO Box 1035 Panama City, FL 32402, www.hhbtm.com

Starlite Motel – If We Switch Drivers, CD

The emo love songs and lyrics on this record by this Fort Myers, Fla., band are really smart. The music is pretty diverse-sounding, from Karate to FIREHOSE. The album title comes from the song "Hook Line And Sinker," asking "How Far To San Diego?" Answer, two days. (DI)

Self-released, www.starlitemotelmusic.com

Starvations – Get Well Soon, CD

It's all too rare that you get to watch a good band become great. Southern California is now getting that rare treat thanks to the Starvations. The band's country/roots-tinged punk has always been at least good, but with this album, the band is making the leap out of the subgenre ghetto. Singer/guitarist Gabriel Hart's mournful wail perfectly matches his utter desperation-inspired lyrics and the band's hollow-bodied guitar clang. While the extra instrumentation move has killed as many bands as it has helped, the addition of accordion and piano only gives the Starvations' electric hangover blues a more timeless quality. (RR)

Gold Standard Laboratories, PO Box 178262, San Diego, CA 92177, [goldstandardlabs.com](http://www.goldstandardlabs.com)

Reviewer Spotlight: Sean Moeller (SM)

RIVERDALES, S/T. I'm a misfit punk rocker, an anomaly of the code. I started with these Riverdales (yeah, I realize the peculiarity in that jumping-off point), stepped back into their former selves, Screeching Weasel, and held Green Day at bay as long as I could through my freshman year of high school. I jacked their logo for the design of the first T-shirts I ever silk-screened, printing the damn things in red, black and blue so I could wear one of them on three different occasions throughout a week. They were the first band I ever took a risk liking. Before Ben Weasel, it was Top-40 radio with Casey Kasem as my sonic tour guide. Before "Judy Go Home" and "I Think About You During The Commercials" became my tracks and the Riverdales my musical homies, the most punk-rock thing I'd done was mixing Coke, Sprite, A&W Root Beer, Sunkist and Dr. Pepper to concoct a "suicide." My bad-boy streak never extended much past those youthful misadventures, but these songs of having fun and sometimes hating girls (while secretly thanking your stars they even let you hate them) were anthems for all of us who missed the Ramones when they first broke.

Currently slamming to: The Shins, *Chutes Too Narrow*; The Long Winters, *When I Pretend To Fall*; The Decemberists, *Her Majesty*; The Rapture, *Echoes*; Outkast, *The Love Below/Speakerboxxx*; Harvey Danger, *Where Have All The Merrymakers Gone?*



Stolen Bike Crusade / Threatning Verse

Stolen Bike Crusade – Lisa Marie, CDEP

If this EP were a weapon, it would be nunchucks. It takes a while to get going, but when it hits its stride, it swirls and strikes like a madman. The vocalist is confident and in command, which is nice to see, and the siren-like guitar interludes are a great, distinctive touch. (DAL)

Self-released, www.stolenbikercrusade.com

Street Dogs – Savin Hill, CD

Street Dogs play no-frills punk rock with gruff vocals and minimal originality. When you buy the CD, you get all kinds of cool extras like interviews and a video. Neat! (KM)

Crosscheck Records, PO Box 39439, Los Angeles, CA 90039, www.crosscheckrecords.com

Street Trash – S/T, 12"

It's 1985; do you know where your Alva skateboard is? Think DRI, ska-rock comps and adolescent nihilism, and you've got Street Trash. The juvenile lyrics, throwback artwork and format (one sided, 12" 45 record) may make it seem like a piss take, but if so, it's one hell of a well-executed one. (RR)

Kapow Records, PO Box 286, Fullerton, CA 92836, www.kapowrecords.com

Streetlight Manifesto – Everything Goes Numb, CD

Streetlight Manifesto is one example of the wrongfulness of the notion that American ska is idle. Commenced just last year, the six-piece ska supergroup has released this spirited debut. This high-energy, horn-heavy entourage combines ska, punk and reggae with harmonizing vocals and meaningful lyrics, thanks to Catch 22's Tomas Kalnoky. (EG)

Victory Records, 346 N. Justine St., Suite 504, Chicago, IL 60607, www.victoryrecords.com

Strength In Numbers – Rise And Resist, CD

These guys play a really driving mix of technical and melodic hardcore. The guitars have a flair for tight metal licks, intricate parts and catchy chug moments. Two vocalists trade off between screaming and singing, and both do it well. But with none of the corn factor of emo metal bands of yesteryear. (NS)

We Make Records, www.wemakerecords.com

Strike Anywhere – Exit English, CD

Blazing melodic hardcore, the kind of thing you wouldn't expect from Jade Tree. *Exit English* is full of intense introspection on a sociopolitical level; band quotes on the onesheet read like mini manifestos against the status quo and complacency. These Richmond boys kick a lot of ass (check "Infrared") and take more

than a few cues from their hometown peers Avail and others like Hot Water Music. *Exit English* is melodic, intense and full of Fat Wreck-style, rapid-fire muted guitar strumming and speedy drum beats. There are also the occasional group-shouted vocals that make me instantly picture a mass of kids rocking out and pointing to singer Thomas Barnett during the intense vocal parts. Definitely recommended, even if you think you've moved beyond this kind of thing. (KR)

Jade Tree Records, 2310 Kennwynn Road, Wilmington, DE 19810, www.jadetree.com

Strychnine – Oakland Stadtmusikanten: Live In Bremen Germany, CD

This searing live record by Oakland's punk 'n' roll kings is probably not the best introduction to the band, but it's definitely recommended for fans. Spanning their entire catalog, they assemble a very satisfying live set, including six covers. How many bands pay homage to X, Turbonegro and Willie Nelson? (AE)

TKO Records, 3216 W. Cary St. #303, Richmond, VA 23221, www.tkorecords.com

Studdogs, The – The Gospel According To, CD

Run of the mill garage/bar rock, mostly distinguishable by the crummy lyrics. It ain't bad, but it lacks the hooks and *oomph* that are essential in making this sorta rock truly great. Sugar Shack makes it look easy. Back to the drawing board, Studdogs. (JG)

Mutiny Productions, 8009 Rhea Circle, Orlando, FL 32807

Sunspot – Loser Of The Year, CD

Sunspot play excellent pop-punk with female backing vocals. The songs are a bit too long, and the production tries too hard to be commercial, but it's hard to resist a release this catchy. Sunspot seems unaffected by any sounds created after 1994, an aberration in today's pop milieu. (AE)

Road Cat Records, PO Box 1006, Madison, WI 53701-1006, www.roadcatrecords.com

Surrounded – Safety In Numbers, CD

Very pretty, dreamy pop-rock. There are some solos, but they are well-timed and not extravagant. I would listen to this to help me sleep. (JG)

Deep Elm Records, PO Box 36393 Charlotte, NC 28236, www.deepelm.com

Sushirobo – The Light-Fingered Feeling Of Sushirobo, CD

I attended a mad-scientist theme party in college, complete with shots served in test tubes and beakers. Had this album existed then, it would've been the ultimate electropop soundtrack. Check "New Laboratory Assistant": "I looked up from the microscope/ When it mattered most/ I admired the fit of her laboratory coat." (EG)

Pattern 25 Records 610 20th Ave. E, Seattle, WA 98112, www.pattern25.com

Sweethearts, The – L.U.V., CD

The Sweethearts play Ramonesque rocking punk with tough-chick vocals. The singing reminds me a little of The Muffs, but thankfully without the screaming (that drives me bananas). I most like the midtempo numbers (particularly "Don't Say Goodbye"), which conjure a '60s girl-group vibe. A promising debut from these young upstarts. (JG)

Mortville Records, 2508 West 12th St. 306, Austin, TX 78703, www.mortvillerecords.com

Tattle Tales, The – ...Get Snappy!, CD

FYI, The Tattle Tales are now The Little Triggers. Got it? Good. Moving on, *Get Snappy* is straight-up pop rock: a little synth here, some hand-claps and harmonies there. For the album's slower listeners, footnotes follow the lyrics. I emphasize "slow" because all of the songs are blatantly about girls. (EG)

Bling Bling Records, c/o Matt Wittmeyer, 500 Clarendon St., Syracuse, NY 13210, www.blingblingrex.com

They Themselves – The No Music Remixed, CD

Formerly of the name Them, Themselves has progressed from poetry-based hip-hop to the avant-garde in only two records. *The No Music* was a piece of ambient noise, dope beats and some introspective words either spit to a beat or just laid down as spoken word. This remixed version seems to bring some of the "songs" together to a more structured level. There's still a lot of experimentation, but it seems to have more of a direction now. Anticon is the indie music fan's hip hop. Some artists are more straight forward; others, like Themselves, push the envelope of hip hop to make art. This expression of music is from the heart and probably one of the more impressive forms of music coming from the indie realm. If you have an open mind, try something new and experimental. It won't hurt you, and chances are you will dig it. (DM)

Anticon, www.anticon.com

Three 4 Tens, The – Taking Northern Liberties, CD

This sounds like psych-pop from the late '60s—pretty good, but it was done better back in then. They seem to like doing drawn-out, acid head free jams, so if you like that, you might like seeing them live. (JG)

Rainbow Quartz International, 440 Ninth Ave., 8th Fl., Rm. 4, New York, NY 10001, www.rainbowquartz.com

Threatning Verse – Time For War, 7"

With "Time for war/ let's kill some more" ripping through your stereo, how could you avoid wanting to spike your hair and toss a brick or two? Angry street punk with the same old message. (TK)

Puke N Vomit Records, PO Box 3435, Fullerton, CA 92831, www.pukenvomit.cjb.net

Reviewer Spotlight: (Mr)Dana Morse (DM)

GET HIGH, S/T. At a time during the mid '90s when it seemed that hXc was tougher than metal and also boring as fuck, there were not a lot of options on the upper East Coast. When the bands like that followed (Snapcase, Converge, Smurf Crisis) provided no new product, I was disappointed. So when the touring punk bands or the occasional local band went against the grain, I was there. Most times I was disappointed, but when I saw Get High, I was completely taken in. Regardless of the rumors that it was a clever name for a straight-edge band or not, these guys provided hardcore with heavy progressive rock and punk influences. Besides having impressive structure, the songs moved with lightning speed that was blistering and soothing at the same time. The vocals were burly and sincere, which complemented the powerful rhythm section. It is also exciting to hear a band where every instrument was treated as such, not just something keeping time. These boys were wicked talented and crucified for being so. People called them a "hipped band" because a song, "Lady Of The Highway," ended with a percussive onslaught. It was a ridiculous label, and Get High eventually became another one of Boston's best-kept secrets. Releasing a weak second LP, II, probably didn't their legacy, either. Oh well, such is the story of a Boston band.

(Mr)Dana picks a winner: The Darkness (cock rock is sooo back); The Bronx; Bluebird, *Hot Blood*; Outkast, *Speakerbox*; Aesop Rock, *Bazooka Tooth*; Street Dogs; RJ-D2; Alias (see review); Black Eyes; Kid Koala and Al Green.

Reviewer Spotlight: Bart Niedzialkowski (BN)

PROPAGANDHI, *How To Clean Everything*. It is hard for me to believe it's been 10 years since I first picked up a copy of Propagandhi's *How To Clean Everything* at a now-defunct Chicago record shop. At that point, I was too young to consider seriously politics or the inherent evil behind those governing us, but this Canadian trio sure made me think. Oddly enough, *How To Clean Everything* proved to be my first true exposure to an LP full of politically charged punk. It was also the first record to open my eyes to how pacified we had become as a society and how selfish, blind and uncaring we were becoming. In a way, this record further instilled in me the values that I was just beginning to discover. Perhaps it was just the timing, as this album reached me just as I experienced my teenage-rebellion phase. Or maybe beneath the sneering vocals, the volatile sound and the angry writing, Propagandhi's songs carried more truth than any music I have ever heard before. (BN)

Recent Favorites: Paint It Black, CVA; Kid Dynamite, *Cheap Shots, Youth Anthems*; Strike Anywhere, *Exit English*; Lower Class Brats, *A Class Of Our Own*; The Lawrence Arms, *The Greatest Story Ever Told*.

Tinklepotty – 40 Acres And A Mule, CD

Trying to convey Jason Branyan's genius is impossible, but I'm going to try. This album officially blew me away. Imagine if the Mr. Bungle album *Disco Volante* were heavier and more experimental, with just one man playing the entire thing. Add some screaming and cello from Yvonne Harada on some of the tracks. It sounds nearly impossible, but I have witnessed it, and this guy knows how to play. When I saw him, he sampled all the complex guitar and bass tracks, which played as he hammered out drums in various jazzy time signatures. In addition to playing drums, he sings, yells and screams his fucking head off. This album is his follow up to *Car Vs. Automobile*, which wasn't recorded as well, but still exudes talent. Tinklepotty tours every once in a while, so keep looking at their website, and order this CD. (TK)
Self-Released, 1521 Alexander St. #704, Honolulu, HI 96822, www.tinklepotty.com

To Hell And Back / The Shemps – split, 7"

I always thought Gloom Records was a hardcore label. Anyway, both The Shemps and To Hell And Back play garage rock that would be a fitting soundtrack for racing your muscle car or playing pool in some greaser bar. Maybe this is an acquired taste? (KM)
Gloom Records, PO Box 14253 Albany, NY 12212, www.gloomrecords.com

Tom Foolery And The Mistakes – Take One For The Team, CD

This is the best record I've heard in a long time. I first listened to it under some kind of ADD overload, and I was looking for a way to explain it in a musical or technical way. Unsuccessful, I threw this CD on while answering some e-mails and caught myself humming along with the songs. There are no easy musical comparisons, but I've settled on Modest Mouse because of the clever lyrics. Later after looking at the picture I realized that the guitarist looks like a little a young Doug Martsch from Built To Spill. Another great thing is the hidden track. After meditating for five minutes, I was rewarded by a most wonderful electronica drum-machine cover of C&C Music Factory's "Things That Make You Go Hmm." Yeah I saw C&C perform twice live in the early '90s, and the Mistakes make it sound so much better. (DJ)
Self-released, 68 W. Longview Ave, Columbus, OH 43202, <http://tomfoolery.freeyellow.com>

Torchy Shad – Nihilism On The Prowl, 7"

Some classic shit from these now-defunct masters of the morbid. It comes with not only lyrics but an explanation of how they came to pen lines like "I said torture me in your punk-rock fanzine." No torture here, just respect. (DAL)
Puke N Vomit Records, PO Box 3435, Fullerton, CA 92831, www.pukenvomit.ajb.net

Trapdoor Fucking Exit – S/T, CDEP

Punk post-hardcore from Sweden. Melody with some bite. They have something in common with bands like the Refused, Manifesto Jukebox and Oil, besides the funny accents. A little bit of groove, a sense of ruckus and some good old-fashioned rock. Four very promising songs. (NS)
No Idea, PO Box 14636, Gainesville, FL 32604-4636, www.noidearecords.com

Tri City Thundercats – Early Recordings, CD

Eight tracks taken from two singles and three live tracks from their Japanese tour make up the *Early Recordings*. The live tracks are low-quality throwaways only noteworthy for the Wire and Buzzcocks covers. The Tri City Thundercats feature some ex-members of the Wipers and Love As Laughter. What a great chance to get their singles in the digital format. (EA)
King Of The Monsters, 8341 E. San Salvador, Scottsdale, AZ 85258, www.kotmrecords.com

Reruns: new reissues from punk's past.

Blacktop Cadence, The – Chemistry For Changing Times, CD

Luke Warm Water Music? A more subdued kind of emotional post-rock document from five years ago is reissued on No Idea. It features the drummer from HWM. (RR)
No Idea, PO Box 14636, Gainesville, FL 32604

Chaos UK – S/T, CD

This classic early British punk album is now available again for all you street-punkin' kids. I gotta say, this is mohawk rock at its finest. Pissed off, boot stompin', gruff, drunkenly sloppy and fast. Includes three bonus tracks. Oi oi! (MG)
Dead Ringer, PO Box 41084, Philadelphia, PA 19127

Chaotic Dischord – Fuck Religion, Fuck Politics, Fuck The Lot Of You, CD

Sloppy British punk rock originally released in 1983. Every song sounds the same, and the singer sounds like he's got marbles in his mouth. Hated it. (KM)

Dead Ringer/Candlelight USA, PO Box 41084, Philadelphia, PA 19127, www.candlelightrecords.co.uk

Cryptic Slaughter – Convicted, CD

Cryptic Slaughter was one of these '80s punk bands that, like Suicidal Tendencies and Bad Brains, began mixing a strong dose of metal into their hardcore sound. The result, as evidenced on this reissue of their first record, produced a glorious, punishing assault on the ears. Very heavy. Very cool. (AJ)
Relapse Records, PO Box 2060, Upper Darby, PA 19082

Cryptic Slaughter – Money Talks, CD

This record is rooted firmly in the beginnings of metal and hardcore crossover, but is somewhat lost on me as I didn't grow up with it. I understand its importance, though, and commend Relapse for keeping such important heavy music available. (DH)
Relapse Records, PO Box 2060, Upper Darby PA 19082

Ego, Gregory – Five Song CD

A 1999 reissue consisting of comedic and overly theatrical songs about "Budapest" and "Senor Mysterioso." One highlight from this mysterious Denver, Colo., singer was a tribute to Neal Cassady, whom Jack Kerouac made a legend. (DJ)
PO Box 481262, Denver, CO 80248, www.gregoryego.com

Eleventh Dream Day – Prairie School

Breakout / Wayne EP, 2xCD

This collection showcases the post-punk sound of the mid- to late '80s. Unlike other Chicago bands, such as Big Black or Naked Raygun, these guys had a somewhat psychedelic sound, similar to Boston's Mission Of Burma and D.C.'s Holy Rollers. Yet they had a sound all their own. This collection also has a CD-ROM live footage. (DM)
Thrill Jockey, PO Box 0803 Chicago, IL 60608, www.thrilljockey.com

* GG Allin & ANTISEEN – Murder Junkies, CD

Reissued to coincide with a series of Murder Junkies reunion shows to commemorate the 10th anniversary of GG's death, this classic record from 1991 is finally back in stores. Musically, it's more representative of an ANTISEEN record than anything GG ever did, but lyrically it isn't representative of either artist. This is GG's most political record, largely written while he was in prison, with angry lyrics stewing over the injustices of the criminal-justice system. His trademark outlaw sexual lyrics largely hang by the wayside as he mulls over more serious issues in songs like "Kill The Police," "My Prison Walls," and "Violence Now." Unfortunately, it was this record that forever damned ANTISEEN into permanent association with GG, but it's still a brilliant, must-have release for those with a mind open enough to understand the relevance of GG in today's phony PC world of selective empathy. It originally included annoying, overwrought monologues from GG between the songs, which thankfully are omitted here. This CD features two bonus tracks not on the vinyl version, including a magnificent rendition of "Cock On The Loose" with dual vocals from GG and ANTISEEN's Jeff Clayton. Notably, Mordam refused to distribute this reissue. (AE)

TKO Records, 5216 W. Cary St. #303, Richmond, VA 23221

* Ghosts & Vodka – Addicts And Drunks, CD

This discography and final release of Ghosts & Vodka (ex-members of Cap'n Jazz, Joan Of Arc and Tetsuo) largely features their 2001 full-length, *Precious Blood*, an instrumental LP of inspired, moody shifts between quiet/pensive to fast/frenetic and everything in between. The dual guitars complement as much as they contrast, creating a musical conversation whose energy guides and drives the ship, gladly, off course (see: Television's *Marquee Moon*). Meanwhile, drums and bass hammer out the melody with a spry and steady rhythm. It all adds up to a collection of imaginative rock tracks that explore every direction without ever losing focus. Minus vocals, the music is forced to speak for itself, and it does. Their previously unreleased bonus track, "Bizarre Funeral," is an exuberant and clever track that, appropriately enough, leaves you wondering and wishing for more of whatever else this band had up their smart, little sleeves. (CC)

Sixgunlover Records, 1029 Reinli, Suite #1, Austin, TX 78723

I Farm – Two Selected Works, CD

This CD compiles I Farm's *Sincerely, Robots* LP as well as their *Learning Russian With I Farm 7"*. Speedy, snotty pop punk that seems like it could have laid the groundwork for many of today's bands of a similar nature. An enjoyable release. (DH)
Big Action Records, 217 East King St., Winona, MN 55987

Kid Icarus – Maps Of The Saints, CD

Triple "re" time: It's a remixed, remastered reissue of the one-man band lo-fi indie pop of Eric Schlitter, aka Kid Icarus, originally released in 1999. (RR)
Summersteps Records, PO Box 447, Moscow, PA 18444

Mills, Chris – Plays And Sings 7" / Nobody's Favorite EP, CD

Take two out-of-print recordings from singer/songwriter Chris Mills, stick 'em on a new shiny platter, and throw them back into circulation. Genius. If you missed Mills' acoustic masterpieces the first time around, make your amends now. Incredible writing, uplifting melody and, oh, that voice. Splendid! (BN)
Powerless Pop, PO Box 20246, Brooklyn, NY 11202-0246

Nerf Herder – My EP, CD

A shitty EP rereleased with bonus tracks. These alleged "kings of nerdcore" had these songs produced again to have a sharper sound for these crappy tunes. I actually don't like this stuff, but the kids love this dorky shit. Mmm-mmm, good. (DM)
Honest Don's, PO Box 19207 San Francisco, CA 94119

Nordine, Ken – Wink, CD

Formerly called *Twink*, this release has Ken Nordine reciting Beat poetry from Robert Shure way back in 1967. Against tongue-in-cheek jazz, are two-sided commentaries about poetry about zebras, windshield wipers falling in love and Indians and idiots drinking apple cider. Throw this baby on during a party and see what happens. Cool, daddy, cool. (DM)
Asphodel Ltd., 763 Brannon St. San Francisco, CA 94103

Ultimate Fakebook – Electric Kissing Parties, CD

UFB's first album reissued. Finally, Cutesy indie pop somewhere between Weezer, Elvis Costello and annoying. I get the feeling that they're a pop band slumming it in punk land. (NS)
Law of Inertia, 61 E. 8th St. #125, New York, NY 10003

Uppercut – Four Walls, CD

Blackout reissues a Gorilla Biscuits-era hardcore EP, backed with a follow-up EP from the band Mind's Eye. Uppercut played quality retro early '90s second wave hardcore in the vein of Shelter, and Mind's Eye played horrible metal crossover hardcore in the vein of Kyuss. A mixed bag. (AE)
Blackout!, 931 Madison St., Hoboken, NJ 07030

V/A – Public Service, CD

Punk-rock history on a brand-new format! Originally released as a tape comp, this featured Redd Kross, RF, Circle One, Bad Religion and Disability bringing you 17 tracks of ground-breaking punk and hardcore in 1981. Now it is your chance to own it without spending \$300 on eBay. (TK)
Puke N Vomit Records, PO Box 3435, Fullerton, CA



TRS-80 - Shake Hands With Danger, CD

Intelligent and intense electronic rock from Chicago, TRS-80 back electronic beats with live drumming, creating a sound that's both new wave and organic. Though the record occasionally drones into an electronic wash, *Shake Hands With Danger*, TRS-80's fourth full-length, hits all the right beats. (JG)

File 13 Records, PO Box 804868, Chicago, IL 60680, www.file-13.com

T.S.O.L. - Divided We Stand, CD

From the Meatmen song "T.S.O.L. Are Sissies" on down, this band always took a lot of shit. This dated sounding wave CD is actually a lot of fun, though. Is it cheesy? Of course it is, but so is almost everything punk related in the end. (AE)

Nitro Records, 7071 Warner Ave., Suite F736, Huntington Beach, CA 93747, www.nitrorecords.com

Twin Haters - S/T, CD

Out of the ashes of Mary Tyler Morphine and treading through metal, hardcore and melodic punk, comes Twin Haters. With tough vocals, metal-tinged guitars and oft-changing tempo, there is enough variety here to satisfy a fan of any of those genres or listeners fond of early '90s Chicago scene. (BN)

Failed Experiment Records, 5420 S. Bishop St. Chicago, IL 60609

2 Worth - United States Of Hysteria, CD

Very California, but not in a bad way. It would be too easy to write off 2 Worth as another Pennywise knockoff. These 21 songs are mainly all

fast and semi-melodic, with political lyrics and fun-to-skate-to guitar lines. The vocalist sounds a little like Lee Ving. (AE)

AVD Records, 8370 W. Cheyenne, Box 109-22, Las Vegas, NV 89129,

www.afternoononline.com

Umiak! - S/T, CD

Exceptional art-core done by a talented three-piece. Umiak delivers a sound reminiscent of many bands that I have heard escaping Ann Arbor, Mich., in the past 10 years. Dual male/female vocals keep the eight tracks interesting. Definitely for the '90s Dischord crowd. (EA)

Self-released, heyumiak@yahoo.com

Unit Breed, The - Walking The Death Watch, CD

It's a real pain in the ass giving a lot of time to dense rock music without an eventual payoff of some kind. Unit Breed proves to be worth the trouble. Joe Demaree is the primary force of the band, providing the majority of the instrumental tracks, singing, songwriting and an extensive booklet filled with his artwork. The sadly recently deceased Matty Luv of Hickey "fame" played on several tracks, and the album is dedicated to him. Songs bounce from lazy jamming rock to intense post-rock to sludged jams within the span of a few bars, but it's still cohesive and compelling. (RR)

Suburban Justice Records, PO Box 56055, Portland, OR 97238, www.suburbanjustice.com

Unpersons - III, CD

Unexceptional metal/hardcore swamps Unperson's III. Once you listen past the usual noise—heavy guitars, screams, growls and mumbling—you might very well catch some big words like obelisk, halcyon, sheath, promenade and spurious (someone brings his the-

TR'S-80 / the Vanity Set

saurus to band practice). "Temple of Defeated Sweat"—now there's a song title. (EG)

At A Loss Recordings, PO Box 582, Eastlake, CO 80614-0582, www.atalosrecordings.com

Usurp Synapse - Disinformation Fix, 2xCD

Disinformation Fix is a great stocking stuffer for the modern hardcore fan. Still, I don't know what's so terrorizing about Usurp Synapse. I didn't feel like I was being mind fucked as the publicist suggests—maybe just a little lightheaded from the band's disregard for melody. (EG)

Alone Records, PO Box 3019, Oswego, NY 13126, www.alonerecords.com

Utah! - Plays Well With Others, CD

Scratchy vocals that play well with humming cello, ideal drumming and a gentle guitar. Eddie Pellino is Mac McCaughan (Superchunk) in voice, with a different agenda. It's one that tames the rocking out side of the personality and persuades the midtempo one to have its day at the fair. (SM)

Bifocal Media, PO Box 50146, Raleigh, NC 27650-0106, www.bifocalmedia.com

Vacancy, The - S/T, CDEP

The Vacancy may look tough, but they play power punk with emotional lyrics undoubtedly influenced by Lifetime. These guys might be beating a dead horse musically, but a few of the songs are catchy and enjoyable enough for multiple listens. (KM)

A-F Records, PO Box 71266 Pittsburgh, PA 15213, www.a-frecords.com

Vanity Set, The - Little Stabs Of Happiness, CD

OK, I'll admit it: This high-art, gothic, opera "rock" music is totally lost on me. It's so brainy and devoid of balls that it's enough to make John Lee Hooker spin around in his grave. The singer, Jim

Demo-lition Derby: CD-Rs

Brwnscks, The - S/T, CDR

Rootsy pop rock with some catchy melodies and a bit of swagger. It's got a "high school crush" kinda vibe. (AJ)

PO Box 22124, Green Bay, WI 54305-2124, the_brunswicks@hotmail.com

End Of A Year - S/T, CDR

A great band, EOAY is a bit Rites of Spring and a lot Moss Icon. One Oh Five Records will soon release their full-length, but this will do in the meantime. (JG)

endofayear@hotmail.com

Fundamentals, The - Murdercycle CDR

Music with a sense of humor, and it spans the spectrum from the 1950s through 1990s. Fourteen songs to keep you (slam) dancing. (DI)

3081 Randolph Court Drive, Ann Arbor, MI 48108, www.the-fundamentals.cc

Garrett-Davis, Josh - Diorama EP, CDR

Josh Garrett achieves Neutral Milk Hotel's quirkiness and sincerity with only a quarter of the instruments. If only Garrett would attempt their vocal variations. (CC)

1123 Northeast Drive, Rapid City, SD 57701, joshgarrettdavis@hotmail.com

Golter - S/T, CDR

Five songs with intros/outros from speech on auto safety and *Merry Christmas, Charlie Brown*. Still impressive math rock from a bunch of kids still wrestling with the Pythagorean Theorem. (SM)

unplugmb@aol.com, weeatherhead@aol.com

Good Life Cycle, CDR

Playing any bar in your town is this south Florida girl singer and four guys. The CD includes the coolest Verbatim Vinyl/CDR but no song titles. (DI)

www.mp3.com/goodlifecycle

Hibachi Stranglers - I Can Play Rock'N Roll Song

For U?, CDR

Here comes a five-song CD from a psychobilly guitar trio. Somewhere between the garage, Jon Spencer and the Cramps. (DI)

hatemail36608@yahoo.com

* Idiosyncratic Routine - Rock Music With Guitars, CDR

A self-done album by one guy named Jason. According to his bio, this is his seventh or eighth album, and it's a lesson in self-reliance: You don't need a lot of money or even friends to make your own music. The album reminded me of early Joy Division, but with high-frequency keyboards that sound like a dentist's drill. I enjoyed this, but some of the songs sounded like they cut out early (a problem with the CDR?). I would have liked to hear a live drummer. (JG)

8115 Freeman Dr., Colorado Springs, CO 80908, snvsnickle@earthlink.net

Neutral Mute - Roc-Sac, CDR

This is a weird DJ demo, with a marked punk influence in speed and rhythm, but it's fairly typical techno overall. (AE)

www.neutralmute.com

Paraplegics, The - It's Downhill From Here, CDR

What a surprise with these 15 songs by this four-piece band from Providence, RI. Old school hardcore with songs about drinking, profanity, family and Doritos. (DI)

www.theparaplegics.com

Puf Paf - The Plump Blueberry, CDR

Very lo-fi instrumental pop with what sounds like guitar, bass, drum machine and banjo. There's too much repetitive noodling and too little song development. (JG)

www.pufpaf.com

Puf Paf - Singing Songs, CDR

Like the other Puf Paf record reviewed here, but with murky vocals. It sounds like something rattling around in a tin can while someone plays an off-key piano in the next room. Slightly compelling at first, then irritating. (JG)

www.pufpaf.com

Quirks, The - S/T, CDR

Kicks off with a creeping, psychobilly tempo and catchy energy. The rest of it is forgettable without any defined style or direction. (CC)

www.thequirks.net

Repellent - Tempjob, CDR

In describing this particular record to a friend, you'd try to remember the modern-rock strivings of a revamped and unfashionably late Alice In Chains. Then you'd blank out tell him to pass the Doritos. (SM)

www.repellent.org

Salt The Earth - S/T, CDR

This is that hardcore with an emo style of music that was popular a few years ago and everyone loved. Not bad, but not spectacular either. (KM)

www.salttheearth.com

Steel Pier Sinners - Live At CBGB's, CDR

Awesome twangy garage band with stellar songs. Nice balance of slide-guitar-driven ballads and full-on rockers. Don't pass this up! (AJ)

www.steelpiersinners.com

Stunt Cock - S/T, CDR

Anchorage, Alaska's finest sons of the hour provide some high-speed, guitar-driven, fast-as-hell punk tunes a la Fat Wreck Chords. Fun stuff. (DM)

www.stuntcock.org

Verktum - S/T, CDR

Five songs that sound like somebody's drunk, older brother singing along to all the videos on *Headbanger's Ball*. That's not meant in a good way. (CC)

Verktum@bellsouth.net

Sclavunos, used to play drums for The Bad Seeds, which I guess gives him the right to completely rip off Nick Cave. I'd expect a former drummer to understand the necessity of laying down a solid beat, but this band's more interested in creating deranged carnival music with a bunch of tubas and strings and shit. It's so high concept that there's bound to be some hipster in N.Y. gearing up to create a theatrical version of this album. (AJ) www.vanityset.com

Vena Cava – So Evolved...Inhuman, CD

This dual vocal male/female vocal punk trio plays stuff that's similar in style to *Unfun*-era Jawbreaker and the Pixies, but they don't sound too much like either. The first listen I wasn't too sure how I felt, but after each listen, it grew on me more and more. Awesome stuff. (DM)

Self-released, 3613 Reynard Way San Diego, CA 92103, www.venacavamusic.com

Via – Deception Pass, CD

Spacey, melodic indie guitars played between hushed vocals and solid, syncopated drum beats. Via has a tone that's slightly more developed and focused than the Appleseed Cast and reminiscent of Modest Mouse. (GBS)

Woodson Lateral Records, 2112 S. Spokane St., Seattle, WA 98144, www.woodsonlateral.com

Virus Nine – Blastin' Away!, CD

Virus Nine are great for what they do. Problem is, it's been done a thousand times before. If each bass line wasn't inspired by Matt Freedman, and the singer's gravely voice didn't mimic producer Duane Peters, *Blastin' Away* would stand anonymous among the legions of generic '77 street-punk records. (GBS)

A-F Records, PO Box 71266, Pittsburgh, PA 15213, www.a-frecords.com

Votolato, Rocky – Suicide Medicine, CD

Votolato's raggedy adolescent voice is this album's best feature. Accompanied by acoustic guitars, melancholy lyrics and the occasional harmonica, Votolato creates pensive songs for the naturally morbid intellectual. Spare, textural and refreshingly muddy. *Suicide Medicine* is a haunting piece of work that reminds of artists like E and J. Buckley. (SP)

Second Nature, PO Box 413084, Kansas City, MO, 64141, www.secondnaturerecordings.com

Wage Of Sin – A Mistaken Belief In Forever, CD

A little too much boring, chug-chug mosh-core for my tastes, but there are some sweet double bass drums and gang vocals. I'm still a sucker for things like that, but not a whole album of them. Also, the songs get longer as the record progresses—not a good idea. (DH)

Immigrant Sun Records, PO Box 150711, Brooklyn, NY 11215, www.immigrantsun.com

Warsawpack – Stocks & Bombs, CD

Winnipeg outfit Warsawpack does fusion right. On *Stocks & Bombs*, it laces hip-hop, jazz, groove and rock while exploring hot-button issues from war

to corporate greed. Lee Raback both pens a mean track and masters delivery, with vocal styles ranging from spoken word to rap to dub singing. (EG) G7 Welcoming Committee, PO Box 27006, 360 Main Street Concourse, Winnipeg, MB, R3C 4T3, Canada, www.g7welcomingcommittee.com

Waxwing – Nobody Can Take What Everybody Owns, 12"

Punky garage-rock with pleasant harmonies and hardy male vocals. Strident at times, more drawn-out and pensive at others, but it remains a little adolescent just the same. (SP)

Excursion Records, PO Box 20224, Seattle, WA 98102, www.excursionrecords.com

We Invented Tornados – S/T, CD

Chunky, guitar-heavy rock that takes its cues from Nirvana. Or maybe a less mathy Quicksand, as the vocals get increasingly Walter-esque as the disc progresses. Very rock—but they have the chops to back their swagger. I recommend you invite these Minneapolis boys into your CD player. (KR)

Learning Curve, 2200 Fourth St. NE, Minneapolis, MN 55418, www.learningcurverecords.com

Westgate – A Fire, CD

Melodic hardcore that mimics the dynamics of early AFI, Westgate also has that from-the-gut immediacy of Avail, but with poppier guitars. Everybody wears their hearts on their sleeves, and *A Fire* is very well produced. Don't be surprised if radio picks 'em up. (GBS)

Jump Start Records, PO Box 10296, State College, PA 16805, www.jumpstartrecords.com

Whatever It Takes – Fistful of Revolution / Stars and Skulls EP, CD

This CD is a collection of two separate releases by WIT. The bass player for the ever-popular Anti-Flag plays guitar and sings for the band. The music is polished punk with political lyrics. It isn't bad, but isn't very exciting or interesting either. For fans of the band/s only. (KM) A-F Records, PO Box 71266 Pittsburgh, PA 15213, www.a-frecords.com

White Outs – Solid State, 7"

This lo-fi garage debut is from a hot new Chicago band with former members of the Motards. It's instantly likable, with fun-loving rhythms on the A-side and a hip country influence on the B-side. The highly conceived, lo-fi recording setup borders on overproduction, but it's still a damn fine 7". (AE)

Shit Sandwich Records, 3107 N. Rockwell, Chicago, IL 60618, www.shitsandwichrecords.com

Why Not – Caution Wet Floor, CD

After all the high-concept stuff I've reviewed lately, it's nice to hear some good old-fashioned punk, complete with the guy in the back shouting "oi, oi, oi." I don't think their tune "Cop Car" is going to be this generation's "Police Truck" or anything, but they're good for some laughs. (DAL)

SoFLA Records, bpskunk@hotmail.com

William – Tints And Shades, CD

Despite some nice guitar work and vocal melodies, this is what Jack Black's character in *High Fidelity* would call "sad-bastard music." Maybe I just need more girls to break up with me, but I never want to listen to anything this depressing. (DH)

Impression Music, www.impressionmusic.com

Winfred E. Eye – The Dirt Tier

Just when all the hipsters are flocking to neu new wave dance nights to see so-and-so remix what's-their-name, the madness is to send you to the rundown dive across the street. Unnamed and barren, save for the cheap Americana that graces the walls, the place is populated by a handful of townies who live out the slogan, "Work Hard, Give Up, Do it Again Tomorrow." Winfred E. Eye would be playing on the jukebox alongside contemporary downers like The Black Heart Procession and Will Oldham. Members from Evergreen (the good one that was on Gravity) and Cars Get Crushed release a third full-length of melancholic, bluesy indie. It's abrasive in its damaged vocals reminiscent of Waits, sparse arrangements and hardly catchy melodies—yet intimate in its honest, dusty delivery. Drunk in that anti-social kind of way, the band charges through its songs like lonely truckers after hauling a shift to the middle of nowhere—no escorts, no pals, and the television is on mute. It's just the neon lights and the harshest whiskey money can buy. (VC)

Luckyhorse Industries, PO Box 18127, Seattle, WA 98118, www.luckyhorseindustries.com

With All Sincerity – The Age Where Nothing Fits, CD

Screaming, fast, experimental hardcore, WAS add some new life to what can be a tired genre. This'll kick you in the head and wake you up. (JJG)

Pluto Records, PO Box 1201 McKinney, TX 75070, www.plutorecords.com

The Wrens, The – The Meadowlands, CD

After a seven-year hiatus and countless label and legal battles, The Wrens have finally released their third full-length album. Like the soundtrack to a sleepy southern town, *The Meadowlands* is a quiet and melancholic record, full of stories of unremarkable lives and lost loves. On the ironically titled "Happy," vocalist Charles Bissell mournfully sings, "I wanted you/ but I'm over that now/ I'm so sick of you/ what we went through." For the uninitiated, The Wrens sound like old Cracker, minus the terrible David Lowery vocals, or a more upbeat take on Pinback's sardonic sound. Not bad for a seven-year itch, not bad at all. (JG)

Absolutely Kosher Records, 1412 10th St., Berkeley, CA 94710-1512,

www.absolutelykosher.com

Young People – War Prayers, CD

An appealing band featuring mature female vocals and smart lyrics. Add some tribal rhythms, heavy bass lines and a southern twang to the whole vibe, and you've got these wonderful youngsters pegged. Visceral stuff. Plus the song titles are cool ("Tammy Faye," "Dutch Oven"). (SP)

Dim Mak Records, PO Box 348, Hollywood, CA 90078, www.dimmak.com

Your Black Star – Grateful Nation, CD

Atmospheric and subtle flowing music that carries a whole lot of feeling. It took me a while to get into this disc, but they ultimately won me over. It's beautifully written, and there was a lot of attention to detail in recording this album. I feel bad for not liking them at first listen. (TK)

Iron Compass Records, PO Box 228, Toledo, OH 43697, www.ironcompassrecords.com

Reviewer Spotlight: Sonia Pereira (SP)

BRIAN FERRY & ROXY MUSIC, *Street Life: 20 Greatest Hits*. Brian Ferry, much like other bygone male pop icons with a particularly sour and ironic sense of urban style (Bowie), cannot sing a song (love, pop, rock or jazzy) without oozing the kind of sensuality D.H. Lawrence spoke about when he described the correct way to eat a fig. It's really quite extraordinary how Ferry's and Roxy Music's genius has maintained such a sense of timelessness in our 10-second one-hit wonder world. That said, if you haven't the pleasure of really listening to Ferry's deep, melodic drawl whilst in a den of darkness (and preferably drinking champagne and swathed in mulberry chintz—that goes for the lads as well), you must do so immediately. Trust me, you will come out of the cocoon a different, more mature, excellently emotionally rounded individual. Ferry classics that you do not want to miss are the romantic "Let's Stick Together," the luscious "Slave To Love" and the lovely "In The Midnight Hour." Ferry, a true romantic of the Heathcliff sort, also likes to cover ageless tunes like "Smoke Gets In Your Eyes" and "These Foolish Things." He's thoroughly British but in a retro sort of way that undermines what could be construed as chi-chi or just plain playboy-ish. A delicious treat to tuck into along with those crumpets you've been hiding under the bed.

What's happening now: Jimmy Scott, *But Beautiful*; XTC, *Drums And Wires*; Ramones, *All the Stuff (And More)* Vol. 1; Nick Cave And The Bad Seeds, *No More Shall We Part*; Big Star, *Third/Sister Lovers*.



v/a Advanced Calculus / v/a A People's History of the Dismemberment Plan

V/A - Advanced Calculus, 2xCD

Pittsburgh is a rare city in that it not only has an incredible music scene, but it also has an incredible college radio station, WRCT. This highly recommended compilation showcases 28 disparate bands recorded live on WRCT, with genres ranging from many different types of hardcore to jazz and hip-hop. (AE)

These Bricks Are Mine, 5001 Baum Blvd Suite 630, Pittsburgh, PA 15213, www.advcalc.com

♀ V/A - Bad Scene, Everyone's Fault: Jawbreaker Tribute, CD

Jawbreaker is my favorite band ever, so I greeted a tribute to them with skepticism. Rightly so—it pained me to hear so many pop-punk bands sterilize these songs. Jawbreaker hailed from Northern California, yet so many of these songs are overproduced, SoCal-style pop-punk dreck: *Fallout Boy*, *Name Taken*, *Travoltas*, *The Reunion Show*, *Nerf Herder*, etc. The bands that experimented with the songs fare the best. Duvall transforms “*Busy*” into a slow dance at a sockhop—very creative and well-executed. Sparta does an amazing job capturing the mournfulness of “*Kiss The Bottle*,” relying on acoustic guitar, ambient noise and mellow, distorted vocals. *Good Night Bad Guy* does the same with its acoustic “*Jet Black*.” I *love* Jeff Ott’s choice of “*Better Half*,” which he plays acoustically with a different take on the guitar parts—very well done. These valiant performances, however, can’t save this comp. (KR)

Dying Wish Records, Ste. 3E, 750 Grand St., Brooklyn, NY 11211, www.dyingwish.com

V/A - Boston Scene Report, CD

Part I of a selected city scene report featuring Boston’s rock ‘n’ roll punk residents. This comp features Suspect Device, Tommy & the Terrors, A-Team and Fast Acting Fuses. These wouldn’t have been my Beantown artist choices, but it does complement a TKO fan’s taste buds. (DM)

TKO Records, 3126 W. Cary St. #303 Richmond, VA 23221, www.tkorecords.com

♀ V/A - Death Before Disco, CD

A dancey as hell compilation of booty-shake songs from artists such as Adult., GoGoAirheart, Dance Disaster Movement and I Am

Spoonbender. About half the songs are previously released, but the combination of songs and the flow of the record make *Death Before Disco* worth it. All punk aesthetic and electronic beats, the 15 songs on *Death Before Disco* create a cohesive and strong hour of music, the perfect soundtrack for solving geometric equations or for your next hip-shaking, too-cool-for-school-party. (JG)

Princehouse Records, PO Box 410353, San Francisco, CA 94141, www.princehouserrecords.com

V/A - Disturbing The Peace, CD

Hardcore is alive and well in the Midwest, and these five bands bring you four songs each to prove it. *Insult To Injury*, *Johnny Vomit*, *Dead End Path*, *Disavow* and *The Struggle* show how diverse the scene is. The gem on this release is the cover of “*18 And Life*” by *The Struggle*. (TK)

NGS Records, PO Box 334, Westmont, IL 60559, www.ngsrecords.com

♀ V/A - Global Indie Clubpop, CD

Don’t let the horrific title and cover art distract you too much. The 12 tracks on *Global Indie Clubpop* are standouts, even if most have been previously recorded. Tracks from *The Pancakes* and *The Raymakers* balance contributions from better known projects like *Stereo Total* and *I Am The World Trade Center*. The highlight of the disc, though, is *Figurine*. Although he’s gained notoriety from his work with *The Postal Service*, *Jimmy Tamborello*’s earlier projects *Strictly Ballroom* and *Figurine* are totally underrated. *Figurine*’s track, “*Impossible*,” is a subtle and catchy little pop song, replete with girl/boy vocals and synth beats, and it’s the perfect addition to this collection. (JG)

Eenie Meenie Records, PO Box 691397, Los Angeles, CA 90069, www.eenieemeenie.com

V/A - Here's Your Warning: A Northwest HC Compilation, CD

A free compilation representing the Northwest featuring 23 songs, including a couple unreleased or rare numbers. Most of the bands are of the hardcore, but not garden, variety. Great tracks from *Champion*, *Pistols At Dusk*, *Rosary*, *Staygold*, *Himsa*, *Screwjack*, *Botch*, *Deadsure* and *The Hit*. And the rest ain’t too shabby either. (NS)

Excursion, PO Box 20224, Seattle, WA 98102, www.excursionrecords.com

V/A - How's My Driving? CD

A great collection of skate-rock and California punk. The blend of classic and current bands makes it seem more like a mix tape from a friend than a packaged comp or another dreadful label sampler. Highlights include *Free Beer*, *the Odd Numbers* and *Texas Thieves*, but there’s nary a bum track in the bunch. (JC)

Super Speedway Records, 108 Paseo De San Antonio, San Jose, CA 95113, www.supersw.com

V/A - Love And Rage Volume 1, CD

Very cool anarchist comp with members of *Nirvana*, *Propagandhi*, *Snog* and *Jello Biafra*, to name a few, all jamming out some strange music. Twenty-one messed up and whacked out tunes from acoustic to techno and everything in between. Cool! (BC)

Love And Rage Records, PO Box 1191, Richmond North VIC 3121, Australia, www.loveandrage.rock.it

V/A - Northwest Kicked In The Nuts, CD

Twenty-five bands from the Northwest that you haven’t heard of and may never hear from again. I couldn’t find more than two tracks I enjoyed. The *Cherry Bombs* do a good *Runaways* impression, and the *Hell Candidates* look and sound old enough to have been *Judas Priest*’s runaways. (EA)

Last Chance Records, PO Box 42996, Portland, OR 97242, www.lastchancerecords.net

V/A - NYHC: Where The Vile Things Are, CD

NYHC’s still around? Bummer. In defense of the four bands here (*Condition*, *Carnage Krew*, *Moral Terror* and *Pledge Of Resistance*), they play the style in a refreshingly retro fashion, mostly ignoring the metallizing of so much hardcore music in the last decade or so. (RR)

NGS Records, PO Box 334, Westmont, IL 60559, www.ngsrecords.com

♀ V/A - A People's History Of The Dismemberment Plan, CD

I was interested to hear if this CD would sound as bad as the idea seemed to me: DJs and other folk reworking D-Plan songs. Those involved seem to be scrambling for a way to spin this as an organic continuation of the D-Plan’s “agenda,” but I wasn’t buying it. This is

Reviewer Spotlight: Rex Reason (RR)

THE LAST, *L.A. Explosion*. While there are several reasons for these spotlights, I feel the most important is to highlight the lost classics of the punk era. I could ramble on endlessly about my undying love for *Double Nickels On The Dime* or *Funhouse*, but there’s no lack of praise for those records, even if they aren’t on some 100 Greatest Albums Music Nerds Jacked To on a cable music channel. Back to the “maybe you missed this great record” function, I submit the Last’s *L.A. Explosion*. When it was released in 1979, The Last was headlining some of the bigger club stages in L.A., and the album was even advertised on a billboard on the Sunset Strip. For whatever reason, South Bay contemporaries like Black Flag and protégés like the Descendents (they even name checked The Last in song) are far more likely to spring to mind when thinking OG L.A. punk. The Last probably didn’t help themselves in that regard. While they were one of the few bands that could share the stage with the punkiest of the original L.A. bands just as easily as the power-pop bands, *L.A. Explosion* was a little too clean in its ‘60s rock via punk wave sound. Once you get past that, the songwriting is among the best of the era, and it’s easy to see where the Descendents took their cues: harmony, pop sensibilities, romantic angst. Thankfully, Bomp finally got around to releasing it on CD, and it includes the lo-fi, superior single versions of some of the album’s best songs. Get this or flunk L.A. Punk.

Five lesser-known greats from the first wave of L.A. punk: The Alleycats, The Flyboys, Rhino 39, F-Word, The Randoms.

Reviewer Spotlight: Kyle Ryan (KR)

A TRIBE CALLED QUEST, *Midnight Marauders*. We’re slowly getting more and more indie hip hop/rap releases here at *Punk Planet*, and I’m excited. As I said when I did a spotlight on *Digable Planets*, sometimes you just gotta kick it. When Phife Dawg opens up this 1993 release with “*Linden Boulevard* represent, represent-sent, A Tribe Called Quest represent represent-sent...” it’s a hip-hop classic. Although critics will attest that 1992’s *The Low End Theory* is the Tribe’s best work, and Tribe toned down their jazz-fusion on *Midnight* to be more commercial, this record still fucking destroys. Unbelievably clever (and intelligent) rhyming (“The wackiest crew try to diss/it makes me laugh/ when my track record’s longer/ than a DC-20 aircraft”), kickass jazz and melody sampling, excellent beats, damn, you can’t go wrong. I’ll admit that gangsta rap has its place, but the posturing bores me after awhile, and the belligerence and shit-talking eventually seems lazy. You’ll find none of it on “*Steve Biko*,” “*Award Tour*” and “*8 Million Stories*,” the 1-2-3 punch that starts *Midnight Marauders*. Track four, “*Sucka Nigga*,” is a kickass examination of the use of the word “nigga” in rhymes. The heavy beats keep coming and so do the dope-ass rhymes. There’s so much to love about this record, though it’ll make you notice how crappy 90 percent of mainstream rap is these days. A Tribe reunion has been rumored for awhile now, and supposedly they’re working on a new album. If it’s true, it’ll be like Michael Jordan returning—hopefully like when he came back to the Bulls, not the Wizards.

Hey sucka nigga, wherever ya are: Jawbreaker, *Dear You* (reissue), Cougars, *Nice, Nice*, Death Cab For Cutie, *Transatlanticism* (reviewed this issue); Hey Mercedes, *Loses Control*, Stereo South, *Justamere Road*.

your favorite D-Plan songs transformed into electronica, noise, house, whatever, and will probably leave you asking, "Huh?" (See Parae's "The Face Of The Earth.") But there are bright spots. Drop Dynasty's version of "What Do You Want Me To Say?" has a lot of interesting elements: cool samples, noise, etc., though it sounds like Trent Reznor did it. Grandmaster Incongruous' "Pay For The Piano" samples Elvis Costello's "Pump It Up." It's an interesting take on the song, though. Cool parts aside, this is mostly weird and noisy, though I have to say I was pleasantly surprised. Still, I can't imagine many people getting into it. (KR)

DeSoto Records, PO Box 60932, Washington, D.C. 20039, www.desotorecords.com

V/A - Scumrock Original Motion Picture Soundtrack

An interesting collection of noise and a few low-fi, possibly indie, songs used as a musical backdrop for this, apparently, award-winning film. Features an unreleased demo from J Church, some funky stuff by Casiotone For The Painfully Alone and ear-wrenching material from Camelot and Toni Ann. (GBS)

New York City Records, PO Box 210535, SF, CA 94121-0535, www.jonmoritsugu.com

⌚ V/A - Snoisse: The Skateboard Sessions, CD

Punk rock and skateboarding have become inextricably linked, but who was the first skate-punk band? Was it JFA, Gang Green or an Oxnard band from California like Ill Repute? Snoisse includes 17 tracks from your favorite skaters (Manak, Peters, Mike V., Caballero, Svitak and Alba, among others) and bands like US Bombs and the Smut Peddlers. With so many tracks, the CD runs the gamut of musical style and quality. The worst is the Shed's "Skater Hater," which sounds like the shed it was recorded in. Two highlights include Sten Guns' "Here We Are Nowhere," a Stiff Little Fingers song and US Bombs' "Roll Around." Mike V. of the Rats draws the most attention lately because of his appearance at Greg Ginn's Black Flag reunion in September. The Rats song, "Dehumanized" is classic BF, with the addition of some extra rhythm guitar breaks. (DL)

Sessions Records, 60 Old El Pueblo Rd. Scotts Valley, CA 95066, www.sessionsrecords.com

⌚ V/A - Still Standing: A North American Ska Uprising, 4xCD

Chicago-based ska guru/DJ Chuck Wren of Jump Up Records and

Toasters frontman Bucket are on a mission to whack the music industry in the complacent ass with this goliath modern ska anthology. *Still Standing* is an 88-song reminder that ska, a hearty 40-odd years old, is many things, but definitely not dead. This is a mixed bag of new tracks from ska vets and new North American bands spanning diverse styles from traditional ska to ska-punk to dub. Although women of ska are often displaced, they find a home here (Barrymores, Agent 00 Zero, Stalking Roxy, Macon Blue Beat Combo). Latin-ska players Voodoo Glow Skulls and Spanish Bombs also find decent coverage. *Still Standing* is a must-own for all ska lovers, but especially for the fairweather listener who thinks ska was never more than a blip on the music radar. Read Chuck justify *Still Standing*'s existence at www.stillstandingska.com. (EG)

Jump Up Records, PO Box 13189, Chicago, IL 60613, www.jumpuprecords.com

V/A - Take Action, Vol. 3, CD

These Sub City compilation track listings always read like a "who's who" of the punk mini-industry. There are some winners and some losers, such Poison The Well, Paint It Black and Much The Same. Forty-five tracks that generously benefit The National Hopeline Network (1-800-SUICIDE). It's about time that punk pays reparations for emo. (VC)

Sub City, PO Box 7495, Van Nuys, CA 91409, www.subcity.net

V/A - Too Young To Die, CD

This compilation raises money for the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention and serves as an educational tool. It contains 19 suitably restrained songs by bands like Pop Unknown, Benton Falls, Appleseed Cast and Red Animal War, plus a public-service announcement. The booklet contains suicide warning signs, facts and resources for help. (DAL)

Deep Elm Records, PO Box 36939, Charlotte, NC 28236, www.deepelm.com

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Punk Planet 4229 N. Honore Chicago IL 60613

Reviewer Spotlight: George B. Sanchez (GBS)

LOS CRUDOS, *Discografia*. Los crudos mas famosos—74 unrelenting songs that are so much more than merely hardcore. Conversation after conversation, the kids of Chicago's Pilsen and Little Village—chicos de la calle—would tell me how important Los Crudos are (not were). A record obviously takes on more meaning when the songs are about the streets you walk and the problems you live, see and breathe on a daily basis. But this record, in retrospect, is also a soundtrack of sorts. It coincides with a generation-wide emergence of Latino pride, the shaking off of a thousand long-silent Spanish tongues and the recognition of the pocho's place in the United States. All of that must be understood in the social context of a not-so-quiet uprising in a place called Chiapas and California's blatantly racist, anti-immigrant proposition 187. The early 1990s were a good time to grow up, as I did in a suburb a long way from Los Crudos' Pilsen. But that's not the point. "Poco a Poco" goes the song: "Tu sangre es nuestra sangre/ Tu enemigo es nuestro enemigo/ Tu lucha es nuestra lucha/ Estamos todos en esta lucha." Or "Your blood is our blood/ Your enemy is our enemy/ Your struggle is our struggle/ We are all in this struggle together." You didn't need to be from Pilsen, and you don't need to be a shade of brown to appreciate them, but damn if their music isn't empowering. That's right, motherfucker, it's that spic band.

Tambien en la casa: James Spooner's Afropunk; El Vez, *Graciasland*; Lucero, S/T; My Morning Jacket, *It Still Moves*; Frank Sinatra, *In The Wee Small Hours*.

Reviewer Spotlight: Neal Shah (NS)

Sparks, *Angst In My Pants*. I remember seeing Sparks on *Saturday Night Live* a long time ago. It was probably the weirdest thing I've seen on *SNL*, other than Terry Sweeney. One guy had a creepy mustache and slicked back hair and did a goofy little dance. The other guy was singing some goofy song about Disneyland. It wasn't until about 10 years later that I discovered that they were more than a bunch of goofs: They were musical geniuses. While their earlier albums featured more of a Queen-meets-disco feel, this early '80s album reflects more of the new-wave sound. But they've been consistently good and diverse throughout their career. What makes Sparks so awesome, besides having great, upbeat music, is their oddball lyrics. "Angst In My Pants" is basically about having a boner. "Sextown USA" exclaims that "we go can go anywhere and it becomes..." And "Moustache" is pretty self-explanatory. Some other known songs from this album include "I Predict" and "Eaten By The Monster Of Love," which is the song in the background during *Valley Girl* when the guy is riding his bike over to the girl's house to have sex with her mom, but then ends of having sex with the daughter. Yeah, there's a common theme of love and sex in their songs, but unlike any whiny emo or pop-punk band, they can still find something new to say about them and they've been doing it for 30 years.

Don't tell me you love me: Concrete Sox, Abandoned, S.T.R.E.E.T.S., Man Without Plan, Aldo Nova, Annihilation Time, Kissing Tigers, Pennywise, Love As Laughter, Meliah Rage.

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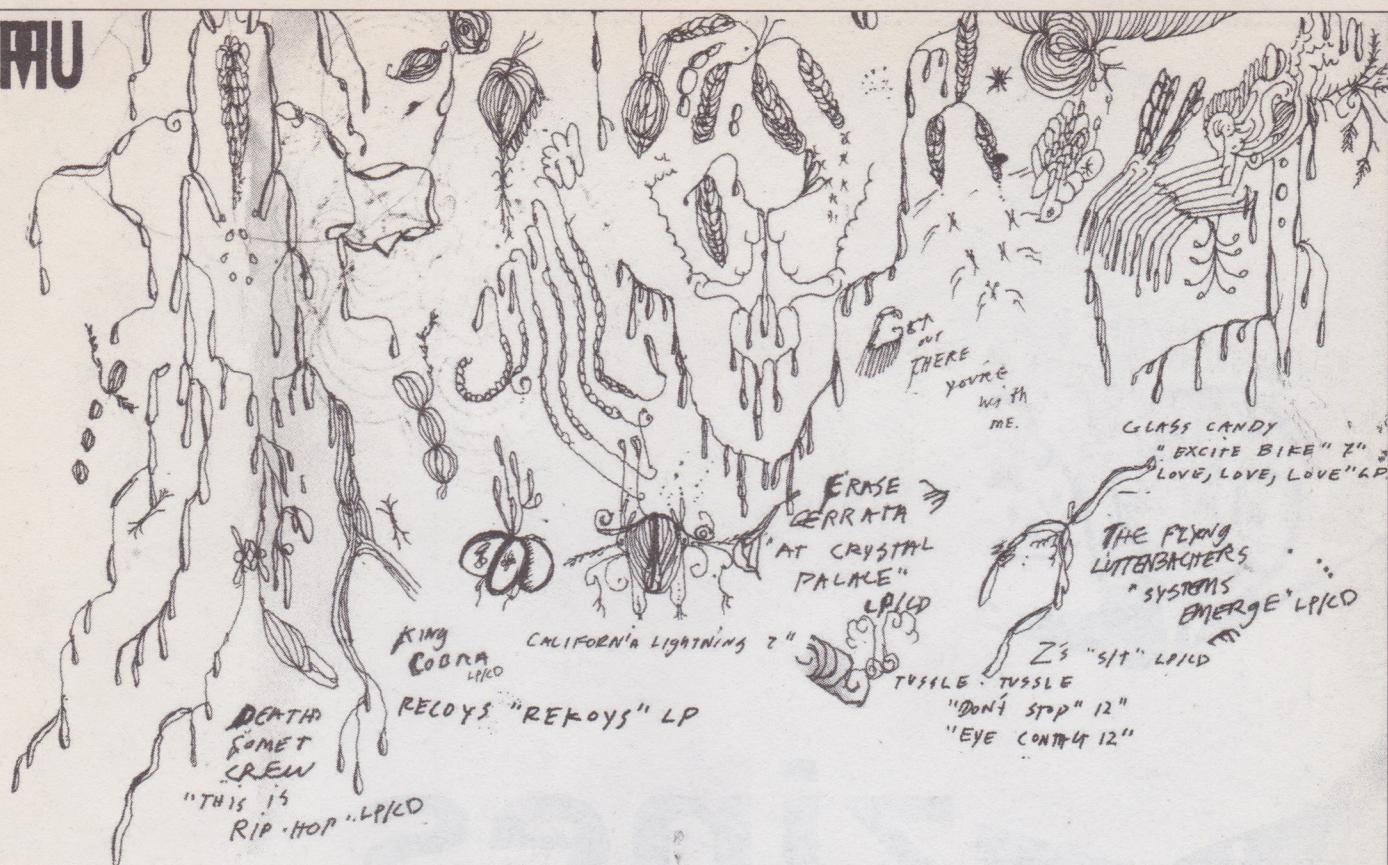
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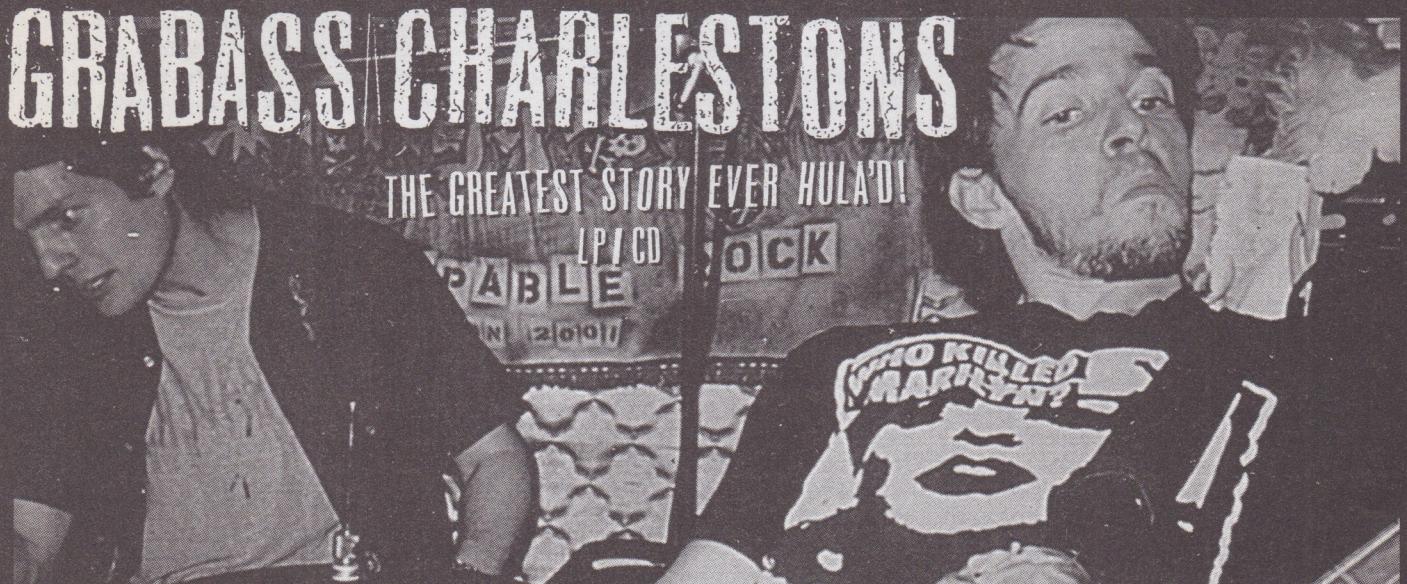
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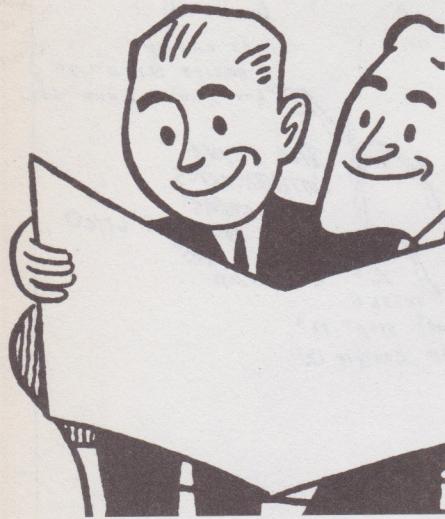
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zines

THIS ISSUE'S REVIEWERS: Amy Adoyzie (AA), Joe Biel (JB), Vincent Chung (VC), Jen Dolan (JD), Erica Gallagher (EG), Dan Laidman (DAL), Patrick Sayers (PS), Claire Sewell (CS)

AK Ink #4

This features extensive coverage of the Alaskan music scene plus beer reviews, comics and enough homophobia to offend a sensitive reader. I'm sure zines are rare up in Alaska, but be critical of interviewees! (JB)

\$2, PO Box 244255 Anchorage, AK 99524, www.akink.com

© America? #11

Gainesville, Fla.'s Wayward Council, a not-for-profit record and book-store/creative space, is an example of what energy, dedication and ambition can generate. *America?* is the companion zine to the volunteer-run store/DIY culture mecca. No. 11 is chock-full of volunteer profiles and Q&As that muse: "Why did you get involved?" "What's up with the high volunteer turnover?" "Does the store operates democratically?" "Is the space successful at battling sexism than the outside world?" We also get to know the founders, including Frank Barber, a local professor of interactive design and multimedia who in 1999 decided there was a need for a new record store in the area. He and a few cohorts began networking for advice, space and merchandise. Other helpers include Matt Sweeting (No Idea Records), Don Fitzpatrick, Laura Predney and David Hayes. When in Gainesville, check out Wayward Council for new and used music, zines, books and t-shirts. (EG)

\$3, PO Box 13077, Gainesville, FL 32604-1077

Bejeezus #3

Duuuude! Where's the dudes? This pro-girl zine is very standard in substance and light on attitude, but still an enjoyable read. It covers more mainstream fare like Miho Hatori (Cibo Matto), Amanda MacKinnon (Bis), and Karen O (YYY). All amazing folks who I'd rather read about here than in *Spin*. (VC)

\$2, PO Box 575, Louisville, KY 40201, www.bejeezuszine.com

© Between The Port And Capital

There is a simple aesthetic to this zine—just two pictures on the covers, a sewn binding and five short stories on the inside—but Greg's writing is top-notch. He weaves together the events of his life in Wilmington and Raleigh, N.C., with his slightly sardonic style. There is a wistful tone of remembrance to all the stories, as if Greg can't quite escape all the memories of his hometown. These intimate snapshot-style stories provide just enough mystery while also leaving me wanting to know a bit more. (CS)

No price given, Greg Lindquist, PO Box 5134, Raleigh, NC 27650-5134, greg_lindquist@hotmail.com

© Bitch # 21

Talk about owning one's language. The makers of *Bitch* took what is largely viewed as a derogatory slur and made it their nameplate for a few dozen zines and counting. No. 21 examines age as it affects the greenest feminist to the veteran Ms. Features in this ish include a look at girls and horror films, race and primetime TV, marketing children's toys by gender and an interview with feminist philosopher Susan Bordo. As always, *Bitch* is bulging with regulars like "Love It/Shove It," where readers underline the media's good and bad treatment of women, "The Bitch List" of goodies the staff applauds, plus columns and book and music reviews. (EG)

\$4.95, 1611 Telegraph Ave., Suite 515, Oakland, CA 94612, www.bitchmagazine.com

Bristle #14

Impressive activist-oriented zine out of Bristol. There's lots of anti-war, anti-government and prison activism articles here, plus a nifty insert of anti-war graffiti from around the area. The best thing about this zine is its range and variety of articles, from direct action in Bristol to paramilitary action in Chiapas. (CS)

£1, Box 25, 82 Colston St., Bristol, BS1 5BB, UK, www.bristle.org.uk

Broken Pencil #22

This is the "comics issue," and it features interviews with Colin Upton and Dave Cooper, plus articles on erotic comics and a timeline of underground comics. As always, there's a lot going on in *Broken Pencil*, but this is one of the more well-rounded issues I've seen in awhile. (CS)

\$4.95, PO Box 203, Stn P, Toronto, ON M5S 2S7, Canada, www.brokenpencil.com

Coming To Amerika #3

No, it's nothing akin to the feel-good, pro-America anthem the gorilla-chested Neil Diamond stilled us with in the '80s. *Coming To Amerika* is a collection of essays and photo illustrations regarding not only our fucked up country, but the exceedingly unpeaceful world told from those who see the perils of war daily. (EG)

\$2, guiltyexpat@yahoo.com

Dagger #32

If you like interviews, this is your zine. Included for your enjoyment are conversations with All Girl Summer Fun Band, Redd Kross, The Deathray Davies, Catherine Irwin and others. A heaping helping of music reviews follows all these. Eat up! (CS)

\$2, Dagger, c/o Tim Hinley, PO Box 820102, Portland, OR 97282-1102, www.indiepages.com/dagger

Double Underground #1

Ted's written a short but inspiring first issue. He writes about life before prison, reclaiming his sovereignty within it and includes a few stories and poems. His style is direct and honest. It really shows that he's only included what's most important to him. I'm looking forward to future issues. (CS)

Free to prisoners or \$2, Fanorama Society Global Headquarters, 109 Arnold Avenue, Cranston, RI 02905



Dreemykream #10

Salad-medley zine with tons of different schtuff. Interview with cult legend Tura Satana, essays on cult films, info on the "God Of Flesh, and other pop-culture rips and tears. Also included are the hodge podge of reviews of flimmy flammy thingies. (AA)

\$3.50, GRADO, 385 Troutman St. #105, Brooklyn, NY 11237, www.dreemykream.com

East Village Inky, The, #20

A mother of two maintains her sanity in this packed personable pocket-sized zine about throwing birthday parties, baking cookies and shopping NYC-style. Chock full of cheeky yuks and selfish entertainment, it's a heartwarming bellyache. She seems like she talks at 400 words a minute, which is amazing. (VC)

\$2, Ayun Halliday (Quality Control), PO Box 22754, Brooklyn, NY 11202, www.ayunhalliday.com

Echo Summer/Fall 2003

Created by journalism undergrads at Columbia College Chicago, this glossy is a mish-mash of articles on Chicago and controversy-free stories (male body sprays: do they really work?, for example). Edgeless articles often stop short of entertainment. At least these kids have the art of the expository essay down cold. (JD)

No price listed, Columbia College Chicago, Journalism Dept., 624 S. Michigan Ave., Chicago, IL 60605, www.echomagonline.com

Fanorama #26

A queer mag with a strong, focused radical agenda. It discusses pris-

oner support, homophobic pop culture and a trip to the Anarchist Bookfair, among other things, by a 47-year-old queer punk. How could you resist? (JB)

\$3, 109 Arnold Ave, Cranston, RI 02905, fanorama@aol.com

Film Geek #9

A tangential foray into the world of film analysis, these musings would make great reading for obsessives (or geeks as it may be). Great entertainment. (JB)

\$1, PO Box 50113 Tulsa, OK 74150

Free Summer Franks

A largely pointless collection of comics spanning 10 years or more by Tim Kelly. Some are impressive, and I'm not sure why others are included. A collection of current stuff would probably be better for new readers. (JB)

\$2, 946 North Indiana Ave., Lindenhurst, NY 11757

☛ H.a.G.L. #30

Twenty years into its existence and six years since the last issue, the UK-based *Have a Good Laugh* ought to reek of the bitterness of any life-hating punker. Instead, editor Trev offers one of the most insightful, educated and enthusiastic punk zines I've recently read. His sense of history runs deep, having covered bands like The Vibrators, Amebix, UK Subs, Crass, etc. in the past 30 issues. He doesn't use his years in the scene as an act of superiority, but instead celebrates punk's rich history and acknowledging its current vibrance (despite much of the music coverage to come from a more historical angle). Booked tight

with scathing political commentary, riotous humor, in-depth interviews and a love of Oi, this zine is enjoyable from cover to cover. Instead of kissing ass with formulated questions, Trev talks to his subjects like peers. Each question is catered to specific details in their history, picking brains for stories, provoking opinions with loaded questions and swapping juicy gossip. His research and knowledge pays off, for everyone provides long-winded and insightful answers. Bands in this issue include Oi Polloi, The Adverts' TV Smith, Intensive Care and Frankie Flame (U-Boat, SUPERYOB, and a token pianist for Oi's heyday). (VC)

\$5 in UK, \$4 U.S., c/o Rosehill, 20 New Front St., Tanfield Lea, Stanley, Co. Durham, DH9 9LY, UK

Heckler #63

With their ad revenue, you'd hope *Heckler* would invest into hard substance rather than a post-*Raygun*-meets-modernism collage of mediocre writing and good skate/surf photography. Also, this pissed me off: "The Locust is only slightly less scary than Dead Guy [sic] and they suck a lot less." Blasphemy! (VC)

1915 21st Street, Sacramento, CA 95814, www.heckler.com

Here Comes The Anti-Bride #3

Sarah's subtitle, "(Idiosyncrasies)," is perfect for this. She writes intimately of moving, whether or not to buy a home, her feelings about her partner and all her different projects. Also very interesting is the piece on obtaining her own speculum. This was a great, introspective read. (CS)

No price given, s4s3s@yahoo.com

ABOUT OUR REVIEWS: We make every attempt to review all the zines (or magazines) we receive, as long as they are released independently. However, despite our best efforts, not every zine ends up in here for a myriad of reasons. Records marked with a little eye (☛) are designated as "highlight" reviews by the reviewer. That means it's a zine that really stands out for them this time around, but just because a review doesn't have an eye doesn't mean it isn't good. Finally, if a reviewer doesn't like your zine, it's just one person's opinion, so don't freak out. We're sure you put a good deal of work into your project and that alone is worth some congratulations!



Here Comes the Anti-Bride / Running on Empty

Here Comes the Anti-Bride #4

Good things do actually come in small packages. At 4.25 inches by 5.5 inches and a mere 30 pages, this issue has been able to do what more ambitious perzines have failed: being unabashedly honest even when it makes you look like a jackass. She admits to histrionic behavior and her drama-queen ways, so she thanks those around her for putting up with it. She admits that sometimes she can be a downer, so she wrote a list of things to do that would cheer her up. Sarah includes an uplifting letter from artist Sol Dewitt to fellow painter Eva Hesse that you'll want to copy a thousand times and pass it passers-by on your way to the market. If that weren't enough, she also chronicles her trials and tribulations in the land of home ownership! Holy all-grown-up! (AA)

No price given, s453s3@yahoo.com

Ideal June #3

Cut-n-paste ditty of ordinary zine fare made up of poetry; essays devoted to teaching you to look like a booze hound and *The Golden Girls*; letters to Dave Coulier and a wig factory. Compilation zines with no themes and mediocre content are a big ol' Woopity bore. (AA)

\$1 + 2 stamps, Walter, 39 29th St., San Francisco, CA 94110, idealjune@yahoo.com

Jinx Removing #6

Stylistically similar to Al Burian's makeshift comic strips, *Jinx Removing* is a short fresh breath of a comic/perzine hybrid. Focusing on his love of comics, Jawbreaker and love itself, *Jinx Removing* is an enjoyable read that's left my eyes peeled for another dose. (PS)

\$1/trade, 1246 W. Pratt Blvd, Apt. 11, Chicago, IL 60626, www.jinxremoving.tripod.com

King Cat #62

John Porcellino takes the mundane minutiae of everyday life ("pimples on my arms," catalpa trees) and turns them into simple yet affecting mini-comics. Also features letters and a killer King Cat Top 40 giving shout-outs to mung bean noodles and getting hitched. Highly recommended. (JD)

\$2, Spit and a Half, PO Box 300367, Denver, CO 80203, www.king-cat.net

Liberphhttppt

Although the layout, odd name and complimentary cyanide pill suggest leftist satire, *Liberphhttppt* is full of cliché-dribbling manifestos and criticism of other (ineffective) political movements. Thankfully, they've provided blank pages for you, the reader, to write whatever you want. Chances are it's more informed than the content already provided. (PS)

\$3, Gingerbread Man Press, 461 Washington St, Eugene, OR 97401

Looking Glass: BMX Culture #1

The fall 2002 ish of *Looking Glass: BMX Culture* is a lot of eye candy for BMX fanatics. Color and black-and-white glossy photos cover each heavy-stock page. While the zine isn't numbered, it's pretty good size. The launch issue begins with Dennis Stancavish's justification for creating a zine in "an already obscenely overcrowded market." The difference, he says, is "*Looking Glass* will cover the culture through the eyes of the riders." It's also about trying to do something different, not necessarily better than the competition. Its audience? "We're a subculture of individuals that for one reason or another have decided to spend the majority of our lives straddling 20-inch pieces of metal," he writes. A few ads pepper the zine, but the majority includes photo essays, interviews (Vic Murphy, Mark Lewman), illustrations and music-related pieces. Although the dynamite images are sure to lure the reader, *Looking Glass* uses awkward, hard-to-read fonts, which are a major turnoff, especially when placed on dark backgrounds. (EG)

\$4, PO Box 519, Elmwood Park, NJ 07407

Looking Glass #2

LG is a glossy featuring an interview with Crimethinc (adapted from the book *Days Of War Nights Of Love*) a story about the demise of BMX riding spots in NJ and plenty of artsy photos. I admire a strong design sensibility, but the graphics and fonts often impede the magazine's readability. (JD)

\$4, PO Box 519, Elmwood Park, NJ 07407, www.lookingglassbm.com

Media Whore #1

Media Whore tackles sexism in mass media and society with lengthy, straightforward essays. The interview with the founder of *Bitch Magazine* was interesting for its focus on the nuts and bolts of magazine publishing. Other topics, like chain bookstores, Eminem and fashion magazines, while fit for smacktalking, are a little tired. (DAL)

\$1/trade, Randie Farmelant, 37 Home Street, Malden, MA 02148

Miscreant #3

I learned a new word from this zine: Christmonger. Rambling political rants that don't inform, but essentially say, "This shit is fucked," permeate the zine about street beat culture. Topped with sweet color graf photos, poems and a vegetarian rap that puts Rob R. Rock to shame. (VC)

\$3, 1415 Commercial Dr., Vancouver, BC, V7L 3X0, Canada, miscreant@hotmail.com

Nerve, The #29-#30

Not the hipster sex mag, though these folks have a porn fixation, too. It's a scene magazine focused on Vancouver, though apparently it gets down to the Seattle area, too. Eclectic mix of reviews, columns with a bewildering, obscene, funny writing style, a crossword puzzle and cartoons, one of which is called "Assballs." (DAL)

Free, 508-825 Granville St., Vancouver, BC, V6Z 1K9, www.thenervemagazine.com

New America #5

It's good to see another issue of this. Cliff and Nate review mostly hardcore records and local shows, but there's also an interview with The Hope Conspiracy. Just for fun, they've included their very own version of Band-A-Minute, which includes some very funny lines about well-known bands. (CS)

\$2, 15906 Brookford, Houston, TX 77059

Northeastern Anarchist, The #4

Concentrating on race and class structures, this zine contains a handful of long-form essays that I found to be a bit heavy on rhetoric at times. This issue also features the history of the ARA, communist economics and reviews of other anarchist literature. (PS)

\$4, PO Box 230685, Boston, MA 02123, www.nefac.net

Other #2

Billed as "the magazine for people who defy categories," *Other* is in part in existence thanks to *Punk Phabet*'s own Joel Schalit. I liked the look of the zine—not quite magazine, not quite zine—and appreciated the diversity of articles. I hope the publication continues to grow and expand. (JD)

\$5, c/o IFUC, PMB #1523, 1850 Union St., San Francisco, CA 94123, www.othermag.org

Paping #8

Eclectic collection of 10 different stories, almost all comics. Mostly innovative and engrossing, at times charming, and only very occasionally filled with pretentious drivel. Two stories in particular have some of the most amazing, striking art I've seen in an indie comic. There's a strong sense of NYC place, which is nice. (DAL)

\$3, PO Box 128, 45 E. Seventh St., NY, NY 10003

Pig's Missing Poo #1

Introducing the strange and beautiful imagination of artist Robert Goodin. With a cast of characters that are often humorous and even slightly grotesque, these four short comics have a fun, childlike morality to them. The self-proclaimed "league leader in smiles" certainly left a smirk on my face. (PS)

\$3, www.robertgoodin.com

Propaganda #1

Standard punk-format zine done by a young English zinester. Interviews with Guy from Fugazi, a member of Alkaline Trio, founder of Asian Man Records, skater Dave Hackett and more, plus lots of reviews. He's got the form down. Now he should add more of his own voice and consider a less generic name. (DAL)

\$2, PO Box 2837, Calverton, NG14 6WU, England

Rancid News #3

An above-average music zine with a strong social conscience. Other features cover TV, vivisection and the arms trade. It's very smart and critical with a great appearance for a young zine. (JB)

\$3, PO Box 382 456-458 The Strand, London WC2R 002 UK

Rated Rookie #5

I wanted to like this, but it just seems like everyone here is trying way too hard to be irreverently funny. Still, you might enjoy such articles as "Easy-Bake Boy," "When Mormons Attack" or even "The Death Of Cool." Some pieces made me chuckle, but most fell flat. (CS)

\$3, 562 Park Place #3, Brooklyn, NY 11238, www.ratedrookie.com

Raw #6

Um, I don't get this. It has a slight satirical tone, but it's too stuck in reprints of goofy news items to be funny or clear. There's a fun interview with the band Mr. Airplane Man, though. Maybe this needs a mission statement or a disclaimer; I can't decide which. (CS)

No price given, rawrawraw@hotmail.com

Rockgrl #48

Glossy mag devoted to all things XX and rock-music-oriented. This issue features a cover story on All Girl Summer Fun Band, Jennie Bomb of Sahara Hotnights fame, Mates Of State's Kori Gardner, Liz Phair. It's a surprisingly good read; *Rockgrl* actually goes beyond scratching the surface of what it means to be a female musician. (AA)

\$4.99, 7683 SE 27th St. #317, Mercer Island, WA 98040, www.rockgrl.com

October #36

For true hardcore-rock aficionados/geeks (I mean that in a good way), the special, LA-themed issue for this Chicago magazine features Sid Laverents, Gamma Goochee, a Gene Simmons interlude, a puppet theater proprietor and tons of rock appreciation. (DAL)

\$4, 1507 E. 53rd St. #617, Chicago, IL 60615, www.october.com

Running On Empty #1

A show promoter from Kent, UK, decides to branch out into zine-dom and recruits friends to contribute recipes and stories while he mans interviews and reviews. For a first issue, it reads OK despite blatant emo gushing during the interview with Slingshot Around the Moon. (JD)

50 pence in the UK, 15 Denver Rd., Dartford, Kent, DA1 3LA, UK, www.runningriotrecords.co.uk

Running On Empty #2

Thrown together with little personality, this UK zine tackles the CD vs. vinyl debate, interviews bands with, "OK... tell me a joke," and reviews records. With a standard column, interviews, reviews cut-n-paste format, this zine is a halfie on the Boner Meter. (VC)

\$3, Jon Wood, 15 Denver Road, Dartford, Kent, DA1 3CA, UK

Semtex #6

A pretty Belgium zine with interviews of bands worldwide. Included in this issue are Belgian's Quetzal, Canada's Ache Records, Germany's Highscore and Marc Isenbugel from the now-defunct Reno Kid. There are also reviews and columns and all other ziney fodder. (AA)
No price given, Thomas Byttebier, Collegealaan 91, 8530 Harelbeke, Belgium, www.setex-inc.com

Sinister Girlz Issue #1, Vol. 2

Self-proclaimed "A Newsletter for Fans by Fans," this fanzine is just what it is. Armed with Microsoft desktop publishing, Comic Sans, and an inkjet printer, three friends go out and hang with their favorite pop-punk bands at skate/surf festivals. Lots of ass-kissing ensues. (VC)
www.sinistergirlz.com, sinister_girlz@yahoo.com

Skyscraper #14

This is one large zine that's definitely honed its craft. There are always a myriad of interviews and reviews, and this issue is no exception: White Out, Trachtenburg Family Slide Show, Polyphonic Spree, Oneida and Pretty Girls Make Graves are all included here among many others, along with tons of reviews. (CS)
\$5, PO Box 4432, Boulder, CO 80306, www.skyscrapermagazine.com

Slave #8

Boasting a beautifully screened front cover, *Slave* combines a passion for hardcore with fiction, art and social issues. This issue contains articles on D.I.Y. screen printing, vegetable oil as an energy alternative and interviews with Most Precious Blood and eco-minded punks Uwharria, of whom a live CD has been included. (PS)
\$4, PO Box 10093, Greensboro, NC 27404, www.slavemagazine.com

Slug & Lettuce #76

I'm embarrassed to say this is my first run in with the esteemed *Slug & Lettuce*, though it's easy to see what all the fuss is about. Making good on the sometimes oxymoronic punk-culture zine, each piece remains equally engaging. Filled with an arsenal of columnists that rivals *Heartattack* and *MRR* in size and surpasses both in content, *Slug & Lettuce* has writers that breathe new life into the oft-explored sectors of zinedom. There are new twists as well, from gardening to organizing a collective and beyond. Activists utilize this forum as a means of celebrating the causes they hold dear and never take the condescending tone that plagues others who use *S & L* as a guideline. Highly recommended to the others who've been under the same rock as I have. (PS)
Free, PO Box 26632, Richmond, VA 23261

Something Delicious This Way Comes

Whoever said that there weren't enough good punk-rock vegan cookbooks out there can now stop holding their collective breaths because Joshua Ploeg has answered our culinary wishes. He culled more than a hundred recipes, spread across 100 pages, all to satisfy your taste buds. Many of them were created while he operated an illegal restaurant out of his living room, so you know this is some good shit if it was cooked under illegal pretenses. From the "Two-Tone Tomato Salad" to "Chipotle Cream Pasta and Meatballs," this ziney-book offers up some tasty treats. Plenty of them have Dutch and Norwegian names that I can't even begin to pronounce, but that's because Joshua was deeply inspired by dishes and ingredients native to those countries. Even if you're not vegan, Joshua suggests substitutes that will keep its super-yumminess intact. If you're ever stuck in a taste-testy emergency, Joshua has included contact info so's you can ask him why your "Donder En Bliksem" (Thunder and Lightning) fell apart. (AA)

\$13, Joshua Ploeg, 1590 SW Riverhill Dr., Hermiston, OR 97838, www.webspawner.com/users/joshuaplague; distro from www.chainsaw.com

Spidder #8

Spidder opens with a brilliant story about working at a warehouse that should be titled "The Wal-Mart for Drugs and Death Metal." He's the young straight-edger who is oblivious to his co-workers making through the week on the fuel of hard drugs and death metal. He claims some genius death-metal guitarists lost their shit in this factory. It segues to some comics, a short interview with Tim Kerr, then to another brilliant story about an old friend getting kicked out of his house and attempting to hitchhike to California. To reiterate, I feel the zine contents other than the stories serve more as filler. This zine would be more enjoyable if the editor concentrated more on writing stories and illustrating them instead of drawing comics. This radiates talent, promise and local character. Despite my criticisms, I was still quite impressed. (JB)
\$2, 1925 Highway 69, S. Savannah, TN 38372

Sprawl #2

Quaint, confused, everywhere and nowhere all at once. Your schizophrenic pal made a zine that is odd with disjointed writings about love and loneliness. Short stories with quick punchlines that are so universal you would swear the exact same thing happened to you. Once you get over the cluttered aesthetics of this zine, it is an interestingly scatter-brained read. Am I even making any sense? (AA)
\$1, 643 Strong Rd., South Windsor, CT 06074

Sprawl #3

Published by a collective of friends, *Sprawl* has a particularly raw feel to its aesthetic and mission. Drawings, poetry, weird graphics collages, rambles, comics and fiction abound. There's not enough cohesion to the end product for my taste, but they do gain punk points for holding zine-release parties. (JD)
\$1, 643 Strong Rd., South Windsor, CT, 06074

Stir Crazy #6

Eager to flood the market with another quasi-political zine, *Stir Crazy* is continually offensive to both the eye and brain. With its continued phallic imagery, half praises of heroin and boring retreads of nearly every liberal hot topic imaginable, *Stir Crazy* earns its title for leaving its reviewer dizzy. (PS)
\$4, PO Box 25148, Rochester, NY 14625

Suburban Legend Comics #2

OK, maybe it's me. I am well past my 20s now and don't have the patience for things I could tolerate, say, when I was 17. *SLC*'s drawing skills are tight, but the subjects (weed! more weed!) left me a bit disappointed that I struggled through so much tiny type. (JD)
Free with postage, 181 Madison Dr., Newark, DE 19711, www.suburbanlegendcomics.com

Suburban Legend Comics #3

Sex, weed, hippie parlances, pizza joints and inside jokes are all the trappings of *Suburban Legend Comics*. Creator Robinson Campbell, while putting his wholehearted effort into the comic art aspect, really nosedives with the story. Unless you're going to request the previous two installments, don't bother with No. 3. (EG)
Free, 181 Madison Dr., Newark, DE 19711, www.suburbanlegendcomics.com

This Is Me Using My Choice: An Anthology Of Women's Abortion Stories

This collection brought me to tears at one point when one of the contributors—days before her abortion—looked down at her belly and apologized to her fetus for having to let it go. As hard as it was sometimes to read account after account of stale clinics and cold doctors, bloodcurdling vacuum clamor, absent fathers and painful procedures, it must have been even harder for these women to write about them. Their courage is commendable. Before I read this, I thought active pro-lifers were a bit over the top with the "Ask me about my abortions"

stickers. Sadly, while most of the storytellers in this zine appreciated their freedom of choice and had no regrets, they wrote a lot about the loneliness, fear and emptiness related to abortion. I think this zine is important because it puts a signature on this ever-controversial issue that is usually explained with cold statistics and opinions of everyone other than the women who are closest to it. (EG)

\$1 (Canada) \$2 (everywhere else); PO Box 21530, 1424 Commercial Dr., Vancouver, BC V5L 5G2, Canada

This Is Still Not About Your Favorite Band

For her 30th birthday, Julie compiled a Greatest Hits sampler of 10 years of zine writing. The rants follow a basic format: present issue. Expound like a motherfucker. About Gilman, hardcore, Absinthe, etc. A healthy part of it feels dated, but this weighty volume was an impressive mass of work. (VC)
\$2 + 3 stamps to Julie Ryan, PO Box 243, Accata, CA 95518

Twelve Knights In My Kingdom

This is a monstrous vegan cookbook with creative ideas I haven't seen before. Some things seem a bit complicated with lots of unique ingredients, but if cooking is your thing and you are up for a challenge, check this out. (JB)
\$13, Joshua Ploeg, 1590 SW Riverhill Dr. Hermiston, OR 97838, lefsewagon@hotmail.com

Watching Days Become Years

Jeff Levine seems to have a lot of time on his hands and nothing to do, but his comics leave you craving more. He have the eye of a poet to explain life's simplest routines. (JB)
\$4.50, Sparkplug, PO Box 10952, Portland, OR 97296, www.sparkplugcomicbooks.com

We Ain't Got No Car #7

Jack Saturn is a sometimes jaded, wandering, cynical philosopher transplanted to his new home in Portland, Ore. His wanderings lead him to comb countless bins of bargain vinyl, contemplate how to react to a post-9/11 world and deal with the death of his grandmother. Jack's writing style and analytical sense carries a strong similarity to Al Burian's *Burn Collector*, which is not a bad thing in this case, as he succeeds in fully making it his own. The thing about this zine, though, is that it resembles a book more than a zine until you open it up and start reading: It's over 250 pages, and it's got a thick spine and a nice letterpress cover with artwork from Clutch McBastard. What more could you ask for? Highly recommended for anyone with time for aimless Saturdays spent in the park. (JB)
\$8, Recursive Delete, PO Box 3824, Portland, OR 97208, www.recdel.com

Wiener Society #7

The "Sick Issue" is sick—calling it visceral is an understatement. Neil delves into the deepest recesses of his fucked up past and how he came to contract Hepatitis-C and his struggle with depression. At times, he may tread the shark-infested waters between romanticizing fucked-upness and showing its consequences. Then you continue reading and realize that punk rock and prison life aren't all about unicorns and rainbows either, especially when you're suffering from a potentially fatal illness. But I'll be damned if this boy isn't positive about his lot in life. He will forever have a slot in the library of punk rock literature. Neil Wiener died for your sins—or at least he went to prison for them.

\$3, free to prisoners. 109 Arnold Ave., Cranston, RI 02905

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comics

THIS ISSUE'S REVIEWERS: Tizzy Asher (TA), Chris Burkhalter (CB), Jason Scott Dodson (JSD), Jim Higgins (JH), Mina Lavender (ML), Philip W. Simon (PWS), edited by Anne Elizabeth Moore (AEM)

Big Questions #5

Arty and understated as all hell, the fifth in Anders Nilsen's self-published series may lack a gripping plot, but possesses a fine quality communicating volumes. (AEM)

\$3.95, self-published: 3103 W. Augusta Blvd, Chicago, IL 60622

Bipolar #3 and #4

Inside the stunning, hypnotically colored covers of *Bipolar*, these budding gurus—the Hanuka Twins—have proven themselves, in only four issues, able explorers, ready to push comics into loftier arenas. Assaf Hanuka, working with writer Etgar Keret, deftly wrestles with magic realism in a twisted limbo populated by suicide victims. Their serialized story "Pizzeria Kamikaze" follows a handsome, dead, pill-popper searching the afterlife for an old lover, amid crazed denizens and in locales of a demented non-existence. With many mind-bending details and colorful supporting characters, this imaginative tale's only flaws are the occasionally distracting grammatical flubs and typos. Tomer Hanuka contributes satisfying, poetic pieces that ooze a surreal, disturbing sadness. "Morocco," the cover story to *Bipolar* #4, is his most realistic and heart-wrenching work so far. (PWS)

\$2.95 ea., by Assaf Hanuka, Tomer Hanuka, and Etgar Keret: Alternative Comics, ISBN 1-891867-24-5 and 1-891867-35-0

Black Heart Billy

Creating politically incorrect art is a luxury that Rick Remender, Harper Jaten (both of *Captain Dingleberry*) and Kieron Dwyer (LCD), have exploited with their latest comic, *Black Heart Billy*. As self-marginalized punks, these artists and their creations choose to remain on the fringes of society and are able to poke fun at social realities only because they do not have to experience them on a daily basis. Billy, a vile skate punk with a robotic head, deals with conflict and weakness by beating it down or blowing it up. It's a replication of ruthlessness, cut-throat attitudes that persist in corporate boardrooms with skateboards instead of Segway transporters. If Remender, Dwyer and Jaten love the status quo so much, they should sell *Black Heart Billy* to Starbucks and discard pretense altogether. (TA)

\$12.95, Rick Remender, Kieron Dwyer, Harper Jaten: AIT/PlanetLar, ISBN 1-932051-02-3

Blankets

With *Blankets*, Craig Thompson has achieved that mixture of rare emotional clarity, depth of movement, and honesty that only a con-

fessional can provide. Drifting in and out of Wisconsin snow banks, hell-fire Jesus dreams, and a young girl's arms, Thompson's autobiographical journey takes us through the wintry recesses of the young artist's memory, pushing back toward small moments of breathless exhilaration, resonant insecurity, aching sex, and pious doubt. What we see is alternately beautiful and sad, a story of family, first love lost, and the quiet redemption of the young soul.

Thompson possesses enough skill and restraint to approach such world-weary themes as loss and love with a fresh eye for nuance and a profound maturity and bravery, never succumbing to the woe-is-me egoist trappings that such themes usually supply. His first full-length graphic novel, *Goodbye, Chunky Rice*, was an imaginative paean to losing love, as told through the bittersweet romance between a turtle and a mouse. The ghost of this lost love haunts and informs every black-and-white panel of *Blankets*: thin white frames hemorrhage into thick black pools, swirling against mad lines of movement, each character a little lost in the macabre mess of a world Thompson has skillfully and tastefully drawn. In the midst of this chaos, *Blankets* reveals a generous beauty, realized in moments of autumnal gleanings and snow-swept silence.

Blankets shows Thompson as a master of pictorial lyricism and form, working two-fold in the manifest realms of expression and realism. Every page announces the obsessive desire to reveal and improve life's imperfections through art. Every detail is carefully chosen, from the Spider-man pajamas to the Bjork poster on the wall; these are things specific to time and place. The massive weight of God, the subtle (and not so subtle) transition into puberty, and the damaging effects on children by family and adults, are all handled through scenes of illustrious wonder, humor, and honesty. *Blankets* is an emotionally daunting book, containing the blustery force of a storm. His noble capacity to reveal that which is most sincere makes you wonder how much more Thompson has to give. It seems he's already given us his all. (JSD)

\$29.95, by Craig Thompson: Top Shelf Productions, ISBN 1-89130-43-0

Broad Appeal

This comic is totally frubjous. For one thing, the cover is totally hyper nifty. I also like that there are more than one subject, so that you do not get bored and want to go out and buy more from that artist. I particularly enjoyed "Ammo Pets" by Diana Sprinkle, (*miyu!) "Angry

Little Girls" by Lela Lee, "Alien Watching" by Shaenon K. Garrity, and "I Was a Teenaged Love Zombie" (totally hilarious) by Janet Hetherington. One of the vices (one out of two) of this comic is that while all of the comics are very good, they can be very confusing at times because they sometimes start the little snippet right in the middle, so you have no idea who the characters are or what the plot is. The other vice is that when you are done you want more!

I would give it four thumbs up, but I do not have four thumbs so I will have to settle for two. Read it by all means as it is totally spectacular, all of the art is good! And it only has two vices! (ML)

\$9.95, Various Artists: Friends of Lulu, ISBN 0-9740960-1-6

He's The Greatest

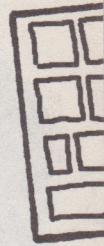
Unlike the crazed Pick-Jesus-Or-it's-Hell-in-A-Hand-Basket comics of *Jack Chick*, *He's The Greatest*, featuring Jesus H. Christ in the starring role, is a moderate Christian comic. The creator, the late Al Hartley, worked for Archie Comics from 1966 to 1993. He also published scores of Christian comics. He even got Jewish publisher John Goldwater to license some of the Archie characters for his Christian publications. *He's The Greatest* is the story of Jesus' mission on Earth, starting with the signing up of the Apostles and ending with his death and resurrection. The tone here is overly earnest. There're so many large, bold-faced words Jesus seems to be yelling every fifth one like he had Tourette's Syndrome. But this comic is clearly aimed at kids. It's the "Big Story," focusing on love without any damnation talk. Now what's wrong with that? (JH)

\$0.49, by Al Hartley: Barbour Christian Comics (originally published in 1986).

Inside Vineyland

A telephone solicitor offered me a week in a deluxe timeshare in Lauren Weinstein's Vineyland, and I took her up on the offer. Several days later, I stood in front of a sign that read *Inside Vineyland*, woefully unprepared for the oddities this landscape would contain. Like Alice's Wonderland, Vineyland is a place where the absurd rules: elephants admit to being gay; floating demon cats sabotage spacecraft; and everything crashes into the video store in Bethesda, Maryland (literally). Craziest of all, no one blinks an eye.

Weinstein loves to play with juxtaposition in Vineyland. Animals traditionally considered cute (puppies, kittens, birds) engage in human pursuits like war and pornography. She sets up "Self-Visualization Activities" for her residents—generic landscapes with



blank spaces in which the viewer can place herself. Weinstein adds extra absurdity by positioning these blank spaces in psychologically telling ways: on top of a giant bridge, curled like a fetus on the Thanksgiving turkey platter, at the beach with Smokey the Bear or Jesus Christ. Vineyard is like that. Everything is a parody of itself.

Which brings me to my one objection about vacationing in Vineyland. There's no rational Alice to guide tourists through the inscrutable logic. All the people in Vineyland wear agonized expressions that shift into a nonsensical garble of chicken scratches as you draw close, so asking for directions from the locals seems futile. I will go back to Vineyland, but next time, I'll bring a friend who can help me translate the oddball visual language into something I can better understand. (TA)

\$5.95, by Lauren Weinstein: Alternative Comics, ISBN 1-891867-44-X

Kometes

Stefan Gruber's minicomic has the loose charm of something by a precocious 11-year-old, but sprinkled with clever glimpses of a deliberate inventiveness (like complementing the word "grafting" with the following panel's "graftify") that earns a smile. (CR)

\$2.75 self-published: 3812 S Hudson #A Seattle, WA 98118

Nightmare Alley

Underground artist Spain Rodriguez, a contemporary of R. Crumb and Robert Williams, has never gotten the attention he deserves. Perhaps neither Arty nor weird enough for his generation, he is nonetheless a master craftsman, and this book is proof. *Nightmare Alley* is a tour-de-force of comics noir; a bravura exhibition of storytelling and composition. Originally done for the Neon Lit line, which included the brilliant adaptation of Paul Auster's *City of Glass*, this 130-page volume lives up to the term graphic novel (it was also a 1947 film). It's the story of low-down con man Stan Carlisle, his rise from small-time carny magician to spiritual medium to the rich, and his eventual

inevitable fall. Hard-hitting and sleazy as hell, the story brims with details of cons, kinks, and human frailties. Although the last half contains jumpy transitions, the book is still a must-read. (JH)

\$14.95, based on the novel by William Lindsay Gresham (1946), adapted and drawn by Spain: Fantagraphics Books. ISBN 1-5609751-1-3

Sweaterweather

Wielding an ever-present, magical innocence, Sara Varon gently drops us into the playful world of her smiling, bipedal animals and the humans with whom they coexist. Refreshing in both content and style, this collection of all-ages tales promotes lessons in compassion, loving friendship, and community, with only a dash of bittersweet emotion. *Sweaterweather's* inventive design and interior bonus surprises—reminiscent of Chris Ware's board games, except playful—show how fun a book of modern comics can be. When one reads the charming tale of two friends who build a public swimming pool and then pass out invitations for the grand opening, the reader is treated to an actual facsimile of the flier, as a tipped-in copy is inserted in the middle of the story. The final bit of this book is educational and interactive, with an overview on beekeeping, cut-out paper dolls, do-it-yourself postcards, and an amazingly clever page filled with perforated Chicago-style postage stamps. (DWS)

€11.95, by Sam Vazquez, Alternative Comics, ISBN 1-891867-49-6

Teratoid Weights

I fell in love with Mat Brinkman's work in 2001's *Non 5* anthology, where it appeared unsigned and interspersed between various works of messy ingenuity or clear brilliance. Brinkman's pages—displays of ludicrous, headless monsters, round-eyed, verminous puffballs, impossible cone-headed machinery, and humungous, dripping, murderous giants making snarky comments to each other like "Great, who's this asshole?" and "Damnit, I'm stabbing my eyes with my teeth"—were distractions comparable to the Sergio Aragónés' teeny *Mad* cartoons I devoured as a kid with more relish than the overblown movie spoofs.

In 2003, Highwater Books released *Teratoid Heights*, a 4" X 5" book the approximate weight and heft of a smooth river rock. The color scheme ranges from obsidian to quartz, leaving the thankfully underpolished drawing style to fend for itself in this harsh world of bright colors and overstylized drawings. Brinkman, a former resident of Fort Thunder, seems to draw on what is available to him: walls, doors, this paper, that notebook, whatever. It works. His monsters and jokes are goofy and personal, as if you found them yourself on the cover of the phone book, dropped behind the couch, or carved into

the wall of the local beer-drinkin' teen hideout.

11-11-1

Unlikely To criticize Jeffrey Brown's work without acknowledging the overwhelming acclaim it's received would be a mistake: A reader could misread phrases such as "Brown's klutzy lines" and "hesitant under-renders" as an assumption on the reviewers part that Brown doesn't know what he's doing. No, Brown knows what he's doing: his klutzy manner underscores his nervousness about revealing the highly personal stories he ultimately shares. He is even aware that without that hesitancy, readers are stuck with just another book about a lonely white boy looking for love. Yet that is what, in the end, readers are stuck with. And critics, to date, have loved it. Brown's sketchiness and awkward human forms, truncated narration, and deliberate lack of polish are giving us what has sold recently in comics: graphic tales that fit neatly into the everyman/"alternative" genre popularized by Chris Ware, Dan Clowes, and others. Readers, however, who want to read comics that *don't* describe the insecurities, sexual inadequacies, and girlfriends of cartoonists—readers who think that an alternative art form should open itself up to a wider exploration of subject matter—will want to look elsewhere. (AEM)

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OUR BOOK REVIEWS ARE EDITED BY Joel Schalit

Open City, Number Seventeen

Open City Press

Open City is part of that new breed of publication that walks the increasingly well-tended middle ground between the literary establishment and the remnants of alternative culture. Unlike such noteworthy rivals as *McSweeney's* and *The Baffler*, however, *Open City* doesn't foreground its indie cred with self-reflexive editor's notes or pseudo-nostalgic advertisements for itself. The emphasis, in other words, falls on the content instead of the frame.

It used to be fashionable, back when everyone was hot and bothered about postmodernism, to argue that the distinction between frame and content had become meaningless. But if *Open City* is any indication, the tide may be turning. *Open City* is not, in other words, the literary journal for all you aging art boys and girls who bought 4AD records because of the design or *Plazm* to study the typefaces. There's not much you can do with an issue other than read the stories or poems inside it.

The effect has grown more pronounced recently. *Open City* is now a magazine in mourning. Founding publisher Robert Bingham died tragically—some would say stupidly—of a drug overdose just as his novel *Lightning on the Sun* was becoming an alternative sensation. His legacy lives on throughout the journal, though, from the full-page ad for Stephen Malkmus's album *Pig Lib*—the song "Church on White" from his first solo effort was a tribute to Bingham—to the acknowledgment that Bingham's family is footing some of the bills.

Despite this sobriety of the presentation, though, this issue of *Open City* has its lighter, "postmodern" pleasures. In "Happy Pills," Mark Jude Poikier uses—and perhaps abuses—the second person to solicit a deliberately dysfunctional identification: "You and Robby sit in Robby's messy dorm room and wash down the last of your wisdom-teeth codeine with Rolling Rock, while you watch a

video from the '60s made for retarded girls about to hit puberty." In "It Takes a Nation of Millions to Hold Us Back," William Bowers shrinks the short story down to the size of one of those portable USB drives, providing a five-minute course in dislocation:

I stay unsalvageably ill-informed about current events. Life in this country, at this time, is, if you choose to let it be, ridiculously simple. Banks are electric shoeboxes. Police keep all the evil out.

I was once kissed randomly, at night, on this street. When I told Donnie Canning about it, he asked, "How do you know it wasn't a whore nostalgic for a freebie?" I'd like a mercenary pen pal. I might place an ad. She, if it's a she, will never have to meet me.

Ultimately, though, whatever irony flits through the pieces here sinks to the bottom, like sediment in a fast-moving stream. The excerpt from Jane Miller's "A Palace of Pearls" captures the issue's tone nicely: "why then is the poet/the last to see as a god/that earth from the heavens is radiant fruit/CHERRIES BLUEBERRIES WHITE PEACHES AND LIMES." If *McSweeney's* speaks to our desire to feel smarter than our feelings, *Open City* reminds us that they are still going to be there when the lights go out.

—Charlie Bertsch

Modern Times, Ancient Hours: Working Lives in the Twenty-First Century.

By Pietro Basso

Verso

To call economics a dismal science is perhaps an understatement. Pietro Basso's *Modern Times, Ancient Hours* is filled with lengthy, dry discussions of statistics on the working day. But that does not make it boring. No, *Modern Times/Ancient Hours* is a work of horror. Basso's book will terrify anybody who is concerned about the quality of life in modern society.

Basso's main concern is the length of the working day in modern industrial and post-industrial societies. His thesis: "In Western society, for at least the past 25 years, the average working time of wage laborers has become increasingly burdensome and invasive—more intense, fast-paced, 'flexible' and long." Basso means that people work more and harder, and have less and less control over when and where they work. This is true in both industry and the service sector.

The working day was a major political concern in 1867, when Marx argued (in *Capital Volume I*) that most of a worker's day was spent manufacturing profit for his or her employer—very little of that work time was required to generate the equivalent value of the worker's wage. Since the advent of the eight-hour day and 40-hour week as US and European norms after World War II, the length of the working day has stagnated. Although this fact has been on the agenda of labor activists in much of Europe, it has gotten less attention in the United States.

This should not be so. Presumably, technology and overall efficiency have improved in most industries and service professions, which means that people could work shorter hours and their employers would make just as much money. Basso quotes 19th century economist John Maynard Keynes, who predicted that advances in machinery and other elements of production efficiency would reduce the number of required working hours for people to levels as low as three hours a day by the 21st century!

Basso argues that the problem is the demand for growth in capitalism and the demand for continual increases in profit. As a result, increases in efficiency are viewed as opportunities for increased profit. This argument also dates back to Marx.

Although Basso's argument is not new, it is a crucially important one—especially as a whole new wave of tech-reporting promises, once again, reduced working hours through revolutions in technology. This is where Basso shines. He juxtaposes the vast technological advances of the past three decades against an ever-increasing work day. Technology has not set us free.



Thus, the majority of *Modern Times/Ancient Hours* consists of careful analysis of statistics on the working day, and lengthy discussions of case studies from a range of sites in Western Europe and the United States. Basso is quick to point out that statistics can be used to lie, and he dissects the premises and assumptions behind the statistics. For instance, Basso reveals that one widely-used study of working hours included both children and retired people in its averages.

In his argument, Basso only considers the United States and Western Europe, but he points out that conditions are far worse in most of the rest of the world, especially in the factories of Southeast Asia and the Maquiladoras just south of the US-Mexico border.

By the end of *Modern Times, Ancient Hours*, you will be convinced that the working day is not only a central issue for labor organizing, but also a crucial site for cultural politics. For someone who works for a living, free time is a precious commodity, and if you work all the time and come home exhausted, you have no energy left to enjoy life, much less to participate in politics.

It took a militant labor movement to get the working day down to the fictional "eight hour" length, and that's why it will take a powerful movement to improve things today. Shorter hours for *all* working people ought to be at the center of any progressive social or political agenda. There is no humane alternative. —Jonathan Sterne

With Intent to Destroy

By Colin Tatz

Verso

What subject evokes as much pain and resignation as genocide? As a crime against both individual and group potential,

it represents unparalleled abstract evil, and as a cyclically occurring event, it randomly tears at the tender flesh of the question of whether "we can all get along." As plainly necessary as the study of genocide may be on its face, the very idea of a methodology to it seems macabre to us—we picture comparative casualty counts and gory details, the forensics that surround a subject best left far from cocktail parties and vacations.

In his wide-ranging book, *With Intent to Destroy*, Colin Tatz takes such discomfiture out of genocidal studies by simply confronting the issues. As a member of both oppressed and oppressor groups, Tatz—an Australian Jew born and educated in pre-'60s South Africa—uses his unique position to objectively show how genocide starts, what distinguishes it from other forms of oppression, and how we deal with its effects. By focusing chapters on three historical case studies—Germany and its Jews, Australia and its Aborigines, and South Africa and its blacks—Tatz convincingly offers his model of "the anatomy of genocide." In doing so, he mitigates what Holocaust scholar Elie Wiesel has called "a mystery that passes our comprehension and represents our defeat."

Tatz opens by personalizing his journey towards studying genocide: childhood memories of newsreels from Europe's death camps; anti-Semitism and educational struggles in Nationalist-ruled South Africa; and his eventual establishment of the Australian Institute for Holocaust and Genocide Studies at Australia's University of New South Wales. It's an ideal way to enter into such bloody abstracts. Since the definition of genocide hangs over so much of the field, Tatz uses as his base the United Nation's 1948 Convention on the subject, which outlines various methods used with intent to partially or fully destroy a national, eth-

nical, racial, or religious group. This allows Tatz to start his unblinking approach from the historical, philosophical, and religious reasons for the Holocaust. His chapter on Germany posits the Holocaust not as an inevitability, but as an "engine"—built out of populist and academic anti-Semitism, scientific racism, emphatic ethnic nationalism, and an attraction to fascism—ready to be switched on.

Conversely, although South Africa killed, exploited, and abused its black population, Tatz excludes the country from the genocide category because the apartheid regime didn't actually intend to destroy the group. Tatz crucially saves up his critical scrutiny for his home country, and for good reason. Between the arrival of the British in 1788 and the government's extension of protection to its native population in 1911, Australian settlers disposed of between 200,000 and 700,000 Aborigines with the tacit approval of the government. Thousands more were forcibly assimilated in the 20th century, mostly by removal of Aboriginal children from their parents into white foster homes. Tatz maintains that these methods, among others outlined in the UN Convention, were aimed at finishing off the population.

It's truly harrowing reading. So is Tatz's subsequent chapter, "Reflecting on Genocide." In it, he evokes aspects of the German and Australian genocides—alongside Turkey's early-20th century genocide of its Armenian population and Rwanda's more recent episode—to examine issues of denialism, memory, apology and restitution. Tatz's ability to pull this off while neither skimming over the subject's inherent profundities nor engaging in the kind of comparisons that trivialize the meaning of genocide speaks to a truth-seeking sensitivity that epitomizes *With Intent to Destroy*.

—Ron Nachmann

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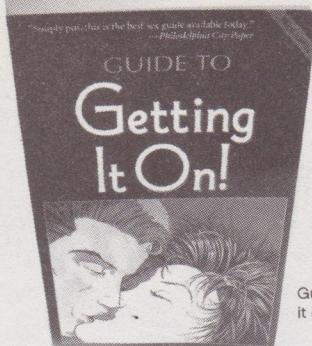
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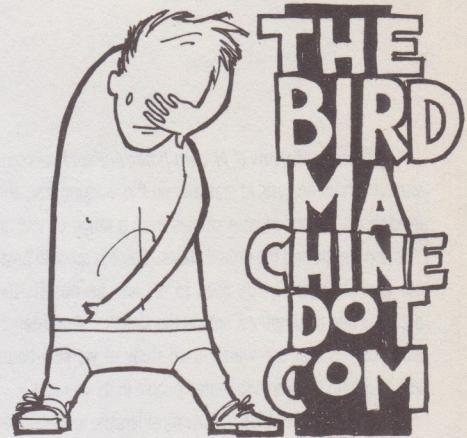


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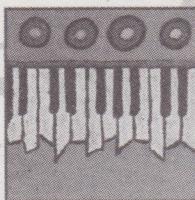
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PP50: OUR KIND OF TOWN. Punk Planet marks its 50th issue with an issue that celebrates the magazine's home: Chicago. Featuring a diverse group of interviews and articles, PP50 showcases the many people, places, and things that make this city unique. To kick things off is the beautiful JON LANGFORD PAINTING of Chicago's Mayor Daley on the magazine's cover. Inside, Langford and bandmate Sally Timms wax philosophical about 25 YEARS OF THE MEKONS and what moving to Chicago has meant for the band. Also interviewed in this issue: post-rock poster darlings TORTOISE talk about why the critics got it all wrong; BLOODSHOT RECORDS explain the link between country and punk; the woman behind VENUS ZINE talks about creating her amazing publication; LOS CRUDOS' MARTIN SORRONDEGUY talks about why he's left Chicago; HOUSING ORGANIZER JAMES MUMM talks about fighting gentrification; GREEN PARTY CANDIDATE (AND PUNK) JASON FARMBMAN talks about taking on Chicago machine politics; the two wonderful people behind HOMOCORE CHICAGO talk about the good old days; the braintrust behind the "dance show for kids of all ages" CHIC-A-GO-GO talk about making one of the best shows on cable access; death row inmate AARON PATTERSON talks about the brutal Chicago cop that beat him into confessing to a murder he didn't commit; indie hip-hoppers THE MOLEMEN drop some knowledge; and garage rockers THE DISHES make some noise. **PLUS MANY MORE INTERVIEWS WITH FOLKS FROM CHICAGO.** In addition, there's all the columns, reviews, DIYs, letters and everything else you've come to expect for 50 issues.

PP51 steers the car head-on into oncoming controversy with the emotional cover story, **WAVE A WHITE FLAG: DODGING BULLETS IN THE OCCUPIED WEST BANK.** In this moving first-hand account, author and frequent PP contributor Jeff Guntzel travels to the West Bank. Dodging bullets and checkpoints Jeff and a small team of dogged activists end up being the first Americans into the Jenin refugee camp after the Israeli

Defense Forces leveled it. A truly heartbreaking story told with great empathy for both sides, Jeff's account is not to be missed. There's a ton more don't-miss material in this issue of Punk Planet including Mark Andersen's (co-author of the DC punk history book *Dance of Days*) unique interview with BRATMOBILE'S ALLISON WOLFE and BLUEGRASS LEGEND HAZEL DICKENS—these two women from different backgrounds and different eras discover just how much they have in common. Also interviewed in PP51: AARON COMETBUS's amazing zine turns 20; EPITAPH RECORDS' CHIEF BRETT GUREWITZ talks about his drug addition, re-joining Bad Religion and learning to love life again; rocker and all-around amazing woman SARAH DOUGHER; Billy Joe Armstrong's ADELINE RECORDS; truly insane rockers GUYANA PUNCH LINE bring the noise; queer punk ANDREW MARTINI (LIMPWRIST, KILL THE MAN WHO QUESTIONS); and much more. Articles in PP51 (in addition to Jeff's amazing account) include a profile of TRANSGENDERED ACTIVIST AND ARTIST ED VARGA; THE PRIVATIZATION OF THE PHILADELPHIA SCHOOL SYSTEM; and an account of the STRUGGLES OF DAY LABORERS IN CHICAGO. And more!

PP52 warms up the cold winter months with **PAY TO CUM**, an in-depth look at the growing trend of punk rock internet porn. Punk Planet's Chris Ziegler delves deep into the world of DIY porn to figure out if it's really offering something different—or is it just the same sleaze operating on a smaller scale? Ziegler's story offers a fascinating look into this world. Also in PP52: Interviews with THE KILLS, Alison from the much-loved Discount's new band; Sex Pistols photographer DENNIS MORRIS; instrumentalists DENALI; author ZOE TROPE; rockers THE HISSYFITS; the always entertaining punk THE FLESHIES (featuring a portrait drawn by cartoonist Janelle); Oaklandish art collective NONCHALANCE; turntablist CHRISTIAN MARCLAY; political hardcore band BLOWBACK; and political thinker MICHAEL PARENTI talks about the "terrorism trap." Other articles in PP52 include a look at RADICAL LIBRARIANS; the

FIGHT AGAINST WHITE-POWER MUSIC; and a look at how THE GAY PRIDE MOVEMENT HAS SOLD OUT. Also making its first appearance in Punk Planet #52 is the magazine's ALL NEW FRONT SECTION, STATIC. While PP51 saw a reduction in the number of columnists writing for PP, PP52 sees the columns move to the back of the magazine and replaced by Static—almost a "zine within a zine" filled with shorter pieces about bands, people, artists, and more. It's totally new and very exciting. But even with the changes, everything you still have come to count on is here: reviews, columns, DIYs, and more... only better! 176 pages.

PP53 leads off with an amazing exclusive interview with the three members of the legendary JAWBREAKER. Seven years after the band broke up, Punk Planet was able to talk with Blake, Chris, and Adam about what happened and look at the lasting legacy of the band. A must-have for fans both new and old, this interview is ultra-candid and truly revealing. The story will only be told once and they told it to Punk Planet. PP53 also features EXTENSIVE COVERAGE OF THE COMING WAR IN IRAQ. In coverage that spans three sections of the magazine Punk Planet looks at life in the streets of Iraq, talks with ex-arms inspector Scott Ritter, and has a chat about the US' history with Iraq with investigative journalist Jeremy Scahill. Eye-opening and, well, downright scary, this coverage gives important background to the Bush administration's insistence on war. It's not all breakups and bombings in PP53, however. Also in the issue are interviews with JOHN DOE about going acoustic, Touch & Go dance party band !!! brings the funk, Lookout's THE PATTERN discusses the rebirth of rock n roll, indie hip-hop artist MR. LIF drops some knowledge, and Punk Planet visits with printer Jen Farrell and STAR-SHAPED PRESS. Additional articles include a look at the ROCK N ROLL CAMP FOR GIRLS; how the government is KILLING WEB RADIO; and a look at what happens to PRISONERS ONCE THEY'RE RELEASED. In addition, PP53 features our new front section STATIC, columns, DIY,

reviews and much more. 160 pgs

PP54 Punk Planet #54 asks the question WHERE HAVE ALL THE MUSICIANS GONE? In this time of war coming at any moment, BRATMOBILE'S ALISON WOLF, ANTI-FLAG'S JUSTIN SANE, SLEATER-KINNEY'S CARRIE BROWNSTEIN, TED LEO, ATOM & HIS PACKAGE, JON LANGFORD, DILLINGER 4'S ERIC FUNK and many more speak out against it with passion and intelligence. Also in this issue, ARTISTS REMEMBER JOE STRUMMER. Interviews in this issue include Omaha's buzz band CURSIVE, label G-7 WELCOMING COMMITTEE, artist ERIC DROOKER (who also provided the art for this issue's cover), Get You War On's DAVID REES, ex-Karate EAMONN VITT, THIS BIKE IS A PIPE BOMB, BLACK DICE and more! And in addition to all that, PP54 features an in-depth look at how CLEAR CHANNEL IS TAKING OVER ROCK CLUBS. It's a jam-packed issue complete with Static, Columns, DIY Files, and much, much more.

PP55 THE REVENGE OF PRINT—our best theme issue ever. So who's in the issue? The powerhouses behind the alt-it zine MCSWEENEY'S share their secrets in a rare interview. The McSweeney's piece is accompanied by an excerpt from bestselling author (and McSweeney's founder) DAVE EGERS' book "You Shall Know Our Velocity". Also interviewed (with writing excerpts too): culture jamming zine STAY FREE, punk rock parenting bible HIP MAMMA, zinester extraordinaire IGGY SCAM, rock critic EVERETT TRUE and his new DIY upstart zine CARELESS TALK COSTS LIVES, self-publishers NO MEDIA KINGS and Screeching Weasel playwright JOHN JUGHEAD, underground comix phenom KAZ, activist/author JAMES TRACY, the brains behind ZINE GUIDE, and the zines EMERGENCY and UNCERTAIN NERVOUS SYSTEMS. It ain't all interviews and writing excerpts in PP55, however. The theme carries over to Punk Planet's articles section as well, with pieces on FEMINIST BOOKSTORES FIGHT TO STAY ALIVE, ZINE LIBRARIES, TOP SHELF COMICS SUCCESSFUL STRUGGLE AGAINST BANKRUPTCY, CHICANO ZINE HASTA CUANDO, and AKASHIC

BOOKS' Johnny Temple writes a manifesto for self publishers. Plus, PP55 features all the reviews, columns, DIY, Static, and more that you've come to expect. Plus, PP55 features a cover design by the internationally celebrated designer ART CHANTRY. Longest issue ever at 184 pgs!

PP56 takes a unique look at life in the military through the eyes of a soldier in the piece "AN ARMY OF NONE". His tale is both funny and sad and offers a perspective you never hear about: the voice of a troop that doesn't want your "support"—he just wants to go back to his regular life. Also in Punk Planet #56: JELLO BIAFRA INTERVIEWS REPORTER GREG PALLAST about the failings of the mainstream media; punk legends WIRE talk about their third time 'round; WILL OLDHAM breaks his press silence in a rare interview; FAT MIKE from NOFX talks politics with Ramsey from AK Press; hardcore purists BANE; ex-Pavement SCOTT KANNBERG talks about moving on; and Brazilian Riot-Girl revolutionaries DOMINATRIX bring the noise. In addition to the cover story, PP56 also features articles about the SILENCING OF THE MEDIA DURING THE WAR and a look at POLITICAL GRAFFITI IN AUSTRALIA. Also DIY, Columns, 30 pages of reviews, and much, much more. 168 pages.

PP57 has a sit-down discussion with the legendary NICK CAVE. In this sprawling, long-form interview, Punk Planet contributing editor Trevor Kelley talks with Cave about his lengthy career and moving back to independents. Punk Planet #57 also features Jeff Guntzel's report from Baghdad, "THE DEVIL INSIDE". Having traveled to Iraq over a half-dozen times during the pre-war era of sanctions and starvation, Guntzel goes back two weeks after Bush declared the US's "mission accomplished" only to discover that it's anything but. In addition to these lead features, PP57 features interviews with TRAVIS MORRISON of the DISMEMBERMENT PLAN about the end of the band; DC buzz band BLACK EYES drops some knowledge; North Dakota's JUNE PANIC talks about his age of enlightenment; the CURSED get pissed; the Indigo Girls'

AMY RAY interviews Native American activist WINONA LADUKE; the filmmakers behind the graffiti documentary STYLE WARS show their street smarts; and the ASIAN DUB FOUNDATION talk about living in a police state. Articles in PP57 include a look at DEPORTATIONS AFTER SEPTEMBER 11th; the FCC'S APPROVAL OF MEDIA CONSOLIDATION; and a hilarious diary from a 48 HOUR SLEEP DEPRIVATION STUDY. 168 pgs

PP58 takes a look at the RISE IN HEROIN PRODUCTION IN AFGHANISTAN. Since the fall of the Taliban, heroin production in the newly liberated country has increased a whopping 1,800%, making Afghanistan the largest heroin-producing country in the world. Focusing his investigative talents on the story, reporter George Sanchez looks into how the US government's need for a quick victory in Afghanistan may have made it all possible. PP58 also features an EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW WITH THE MEMBERS OF GOVERNMENT ISSUE. Also: Interviews with Dan Yemen from PAINT IT BLACK—the longtime hardcore hero talks about his brush with death and the new band (and life) that grew out of it; the inimitable TV ON THE RADIO talk about their unique sound and life in New York City post-Sept 11; THE LEGENDARY SHACK SHAKERS talk about god, the devil, and rock'n'roll; and THE JEALOUS SOUND talk about growing old in emo; and German art-rocker ANGIE REED talks about the sexiness of secretaries. Articles in PP58 include a look at BUDDHISM AND PUNK ROCK through the eyes of the author of the new book Dharma Punk; A PHOTO ESSAY ON A FAIR TRADE COFFEE FARM; the CELEBRATE PEOPLE'S HISTORY POSTER PROJECT; THE FIGHT TO SAVE MEXICO'S EL CHOPO MARKET; and a first-person essay about A JOB EDITING PORN. Truly packed from cover to cover, this issue promises to be quite a page turner. 168 pgs.

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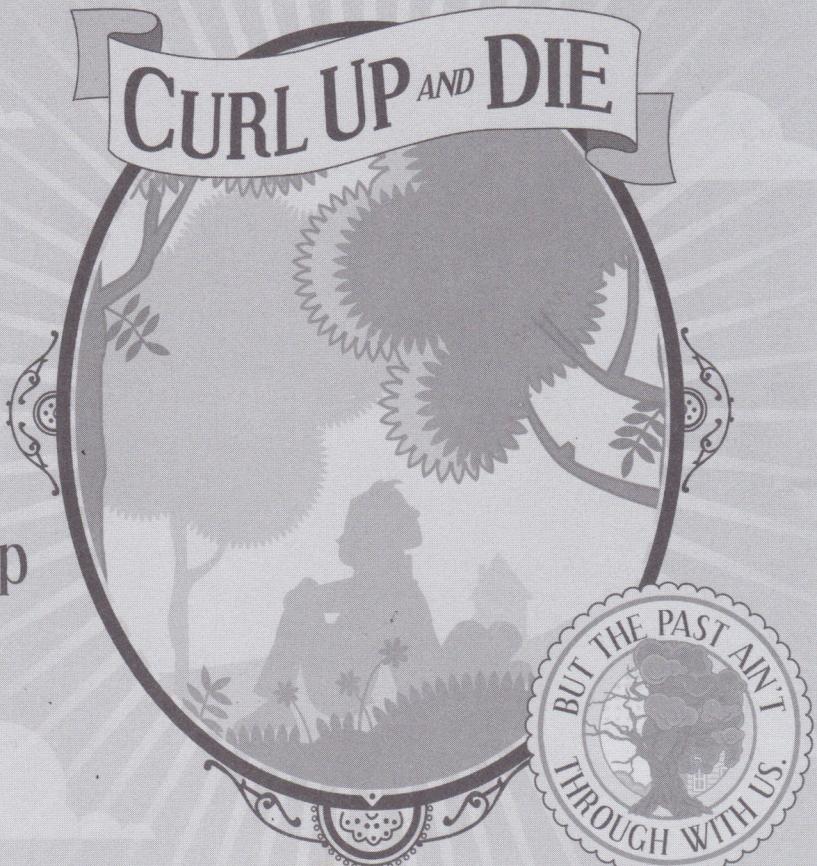
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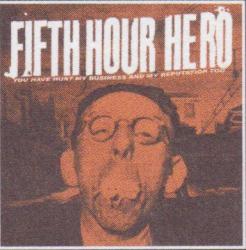
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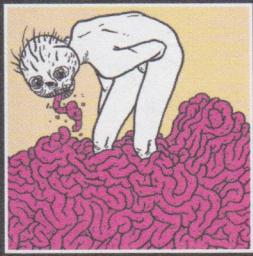
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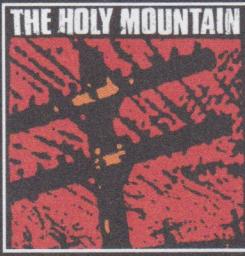
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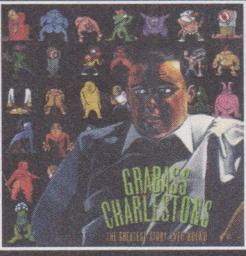
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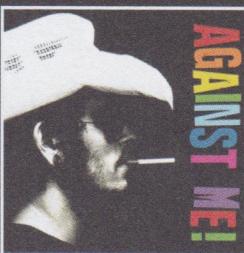
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